

“The ‘Myth’ and Reality of Rescue from the Holocaust: The Karski–Koestler and Vrba–Wetzler Reports.”

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Abstract:

Reliable information about the progress of the Holocaust was not readily available before the end of the Second World War. It has been argued that the Allies could not have saved more Jews under the given circumstances. The analysis of two important first-hand reports of 1942 and 1944 suggest, however, a different interpretation. These reports were dramatic in their impact and instrumental in bringing about rescue efforts. If these documents had not been subject to restrictions and delays in reaching a wide readership, they could have been even more effective in mobilizing public opinion in support of rescue missions.

Text of paper:

The “Myth” and Reality of Rescue from the Holocaust:

The Karski-Koestler and Vrba-Wetzler Reports

William D. Rubinstein writes at the outset of his recent book about the *Myth of Rescue* “that no Jew who perished during the Nazi Holocaust could have been saved by any action which the Allies could have taken at the time, given what was actually known about the Holocaust, what was *actually proposed* at the time and what was realistically possible.”ⁱ⁾ An important factor in the complex web of Rubinstein’s closely argued thesis is the matter of reliable information available to the Allies and to the public they represented. Realistic options depended on precise knowledge about the Nazi plans of a “final solution.” Therefore, a precondition for a balanced and reliable judgment about “the myth of rescue” is a determination of when crucial information into the hands of the Allies, who had access to it, and what was done about it. Rubenstein does not devote serious attention to these questions.

Two reports—because of their spectacular nature—deserve special attention. They are without parallel in laying bare the previously unimagined dimensions of the Nazi exterminations plans: Jan Karski’s report about the situation in Poland in 1942, transmitted on the BBC by Arthur Koestler, and the Auschwitz report of Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler of April 1944. The first of these two reports about the progress of the Holocaust came to London from Poland, only a few months after the crucial Wannsee Conference, with clear evidence of a systematic killing in progress. The author of the report, who represented the Polish underground, probably followed his leaders’ wishes in not identifying himself.

. . . I am not a Jew myself, and before the war I had very little contact with Jews; in fact, I knew practically nothing about them. But, at present, the extermination of the Jews has a special significance. The sufferings of my own Polish compatriots are terrible, and they are, of course, nearer to my heart; but the methods employed by the enemy against Poles and against Jews are different. Us, the Poles, they try to reduce to a mediaeval race of serfs. They want to deprive us of our cultural standards, of our traditions, of our education, and reduce us to a nation of robots. But the policy towards the Jews is different. It is not a policy of subjugation and oppression, but of cold and systematic extermination. It is the first example in modern history that a whole nation (not 10, 20, and 30, but 100 per cent of them) are meant to disappear from this earth. ⁱⁱ

Despite the delineation of distinctions between Poles and Jews, Karski’s words leave no doubt that he was deeply concerned about the fate of the Jews. In an earlier report to the Polish government-in-exile as recently as February 1940, Karski had given a negative assessment of the behavior of Jews, who, clearly in conflict with the Polish national interests, appeared to sympathize with the Russians and Bolsheviks. At that time Karski did not see that Jews and Poles could form any kind of alliance.ⁱⁱⁱ An overwhelming experience shortly before his departure from Poland in October 1942 transformed his views. Karski still stressed that his loyalty to Poland took precedence over his strong sympathies for the Jewish fate. But now he recognized that the Jews faced the threat of “cold and systematic extermination.” He finally saw the Nazi onslaught as an unprecedented event in modern history.

The experiences that transformed Karski were face-to-face encounters with the Nazi machinery of systematic killing. Although gas chambers were already in operation at Belzec, Karski found access only to a portion of the camp that employed a less efficient but equally brutal method of extermination. Disguised in a police uniform and under the guidance of an Estonian guard of the Gestapo, Karski was able to observe from close range masses of Jews being forced into the freight cars of a train, each designed normally for at most eight horses or forty soldiers, but now forced to hold 120-130 people.

The details of how they die are simple and revolting: the chloride of lime on the floor has the property of developing chlorine gas when coming into contact with humidity. The people jammed into the trucks for many hours are compelled, at some time, to urinate, and this (on the lime), instantaneously produces a chemical reaction. Death must in the end be welcome, for whilst they are dying by the chlorine gas their feet are

being burned to the bone by the chemically active chloride. As I said, the number executed in one death train is about 6,000 at a time.^{iv}

From his guide Karski learned that trains, following the pattern he observed, had been dispatched at the rate of one or two per week for several months. The trains moved with their victims about twenty-five miles to an open field, and there, Karski was told by his guide, the bodies were dumped into mass graves.

Arthur Koestler, who, soon after Karski’s arrival in London in November of 1942, met the messenger from occupied Poland, took on the assignment of interviewing and communicating Karski’s report to the general public. Koestler remembered Karski as “a very modest, unassuming, very tall, rather aristocratic Pole.” Although Koestler had been the recipient of numerous reports of Nazi atrocities and taken part in efforts to inform the general public, he was aware that this report was different, and he was tormented by the difficulty of his task. “I tried to make out a proper script,” he confided, “but it just doesn’t come off. I have done too much of this sort of thing, and I am paralyzed by the feeling that the facts are so horrible that nobody will believe them.” After considerable delay the BBC transmitted Koestler’s report in June 1943. The comparison of Koestler’s text, published in a pamphlet, *Terror in Europe*, with Karski’s narrative *Story of a Secret State*, published following year, shows that the text that Koestler helped to prepare was incomplete. His account only contained the visit to Belzec and lacked another, equally significant experience. Missing from Koestler’s narrative is the description of Karski’s two visits to the Warsaw Ghetto, also made with the aid and with the guidance of the Jewish underground. These visits, which preceded the trip to Belzec, represented crucial experiences that helped Karski grasp essential elements of the Nazi’s secret

campaign against the Jews. If Karski was convincing in his interviews with political leaders in London and Washington, his persuasiveness was certainly based on his broad experience.

Descending first into the cellar of an apartment building on the “Aryan” side of the Ghetto and wearing ragged clothes with a yellow Jewish star, Karski and two Jewish companions, one of whom was Leon Feiner, a Warsaw lawyer, labor leader, and head of the socialist *Bund*, made their way through a secret tunnel into the isolated and closely guarded Jewish quarter.^v Karski was not prepared for the ghastly scenes that he confronted:

A cemetery? No, for these bodies were still moving, were indeed often violently agitated. These were still living people, if you could call them such. For apart from their skin, eyes, and voice there was nothing human left in these palpitating figures. Everywhere there was hunger, misery, the atrocious stench of decomposing bodies, the pitiful moans of dying children, the desperate cries and gasps of a people struggling for life against impossible odds.^{vi}

Sickened by what he saw, after observing Hitler youths playing target practice by shooting down Jews, Karski was unable to keep his composure and asked to be led out of the Ghetto. He returned later, however, to collect further information about the details of the Nazi operations and thus “to memorize more vividly my visual impressions.”^{vii}

The Warsaw ghetto and the camp at Belzec were the basis of the reports Karski took to General Sikorski and other Polish exile leaders in London. Although his report certainly dealt only with the Jewish plight as one of several important issues facing Poland under the Nazis, the images he conveyed about the Jews could not have been

more dramatic. The impact disabled, if only temporarily, general resistance in Polish government circles to making the Jewish issue a question of policy priority during the war; the new, reliable information, in concert with other reports converging from different directions, forced the allies to discuss advisability of a common declaration.^{viii} Issued jointly by several governments, including Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States, on December 17, the declaration condemned “the bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination.”^{ix}

The effectiveness of Karski’s interviews was due in no small part to his ability to confirm with a great degree of credibility what had been reported widely by second-hand sources. The enormity of the crimes and the expectations of the Jewish leaders who entrusted Karski with the task of informing the Allies (“Tell them that the earth must be shaken to its foundations; the world must be aroused.”^x) required an unprecedented power from the spoken and written words. It was as if a new genre of communication had to be invented. Karski claimed that he developed a method for delivering his message. He found that “the most effective way of getting [his] material across was not to soften or interpret it, but to convey it as directly as possible, reproducing not merely ideas and instructions but the language, gestures and nuances of those from whom the material came.”^{xi} The clarity, directness, and simplicity of Karski’s language certainly contributed to a powerful impact. The report became an instrument that affected politics at the highest levels.

Nevertheless, Karski’s apparent success could impede the view of the mission’s darker side. Although he reached wide audiences and succeeded in talking to heads of

state and other people close to the centers of power, his influence on the political process was disappointing. In February he had a chance to report to Anthony Eden. The discussion that followed the report focused on the question of Polish-Soviet relations. When Karski asked for permission to see Prime Minister Churchill, Eden denied the request. In June Karski traveled to the United States, where he met Chief Justice Felix Frankfurter, who reacted with disbelief to the descriptions of atrocities against the Jews. Karski also had an extensive interview with President Roosevelt. Although he did not go into the details of his experiences in the Warsaw Ghetto and in Belzec, Karski was able to convey the plight of the Jews in a general way. Karski relayed the urgent message of the Jewish underground: if the Germans did not abandon their plans or the Allies did not intervene, the Jewish people of Poland would soon cease to exist.

Karski believed that he had failed to move the president to act in behalf of the Jews. However, John Pehle, whom the president appointed as the first head of the War Refugee Board, later claimed that the interview with Karski had made a difference in Roosevelt’s understanding of the problem. At any rate, the formation of the War Refugee Board was a significant action to deal with the problem of rescue. It was, nonetheless, a late and long overdue action, occurring only in January, 1944.^{xii} The gulf between the cry for help and an effective rescue effort was considerable.

Koestler felt deeply frustrated by failures to convey a sense of urgency. He read Karski’s report on the BBC in July 1943; shortly thereafter he published his novel *Arrival and Departure*, a work of fiction that included a segment on the progress of the Holocaust.^{xiii} This segment, under the title “Mixed Transport,” was also published in the

October issue of *Horizon*, a prominent literary periodical in Britain during the war years.

It described the details of mass gassings of Jews in trucks, an operation about which Koestler obtained information not from Karski but from another source. As early as January 1942 the first information about gassing vans in Chelmno reached Warsaw; then the six-page account of a small group of gravediggers, who succeeded in escaping, finally found its way to London.^{xiv} This account undoubtedly formed the basis of a literary text with a documentary character.

The reaction of *Horizon’s* readership to Koestler’s text is noteworthy. Letters to the editor forced the *Horizon* to react in its November issue. The editor asked the readers “who expressed doubts about the veracity of Koestler’s ‘Mixed Transport’ to obtain and read the text of the Polish eye-witness broadcast.” In the December issue an angry Koestler responded to the doubting readers: “. . . you have the brazenness to ask whether it is true that you are the contemporary of the greatest massacre in recorded history. If you tell me that you don’t read newspapers, white-books, documentary pamphlets obtainable at W.H. Smith bookstalls—why on earth do you read *Horizon* and call yourself a member of the intelligentsia?” Koestler elaborated in an article in the *New York Times Magazine* (January 1944) on the “Disbelieving the Atrocities.” He reported that according to a recent opinion survey, nine out of ten average American citizens believed that the atrocities were propaganda lies.

The Karski mission, insofar as it dealt with the Jewish plight, had a significant impact. But in the larger context of the Allied policies or in the matter of influencing public opinion, its effectiveness is modest. Karki defined the essential requirements of

imparting his message: not attempting to interpret but to convey the facts precisely.

The Polish government-in-exile did not see to it immediately that a written in this spirit, comprehensive and clearly attributed to Karski, should become widely distributed.

Instead, this ideal text existed too long primarily in a spoken form, and when it reached the inner circles of power, it was often relegated to an inferior position, next to competing political agendas. The question of rescue could not become a realistic war aim of the Allies, as the Jewish leaders in Warsaw requested, and without a radical reorientation of public opinion such an expectation was probably unrealistic. Could a more effective exploitation of Karski’s mission have accomplished that? It is a matter of speculation whether as a result of fragmentation and delays, and despite Karski’s and Koestler’s sincere efforts, a unique opportunity was missed at a crucial, relatively early stage in the progress of the Holocaust.

* * *

Analogous patterns of success and failure can be detected in the fate of the Vrba-Wetzler report of April 1944. At this advanced stage of the Holocaust the authors, who described the operation of the extermination camp at Auschwitz, had inside information about the Nazi’s most closely guarded secret: the past, present, and future of an efficient extermination machine. When they succeeded in escaping and telling their incredible story, Vrba and Wetzler provided the world information that it needed to prevent the destruction of the Jewish population in Hungary, the next stage in the Nazi designs of annihilation. When

Rudolf Vrba first formulated the title of his book *I Cannot Forgive*, published in London in 1964, he was undoubtedly directing his words to the perpetrators of the hell of Auschwitz, where he had been prisoner for almost two years. At the same time, the report that he and his partner Alfred Wetzler wrote shortly after their escape, had a mission similar to the reports of Karski and Koestler. But because the Auschwitz report could not be carried by the two eye-witnesses to Hungary or to the West, it was distributed in multiple copies and sent on uncertain journeys in different directions. Its ultimate impact involved many potential agents of rescue as well as many more opponents for whom public knowledge about the report appeared to be a threat. The authors of the report hoped to impede the efficient operation of the death machine. Since their report, providing forty pages of detail on all aspects of the camp’s organization, purpose, and functioning, actually reached Hungary before the deportations to Auschwitz began, this text clearly acquired the character of an instrument of rescue. As one who experienced and survived the deportation from Hungary to Auschwitz, Elie Wiesel addresses the challenge and apparent failure that this crucial text represented.

. . . I believe the tragedy of the Hungarian Jewry is a severe indictment. Why didn't we know? I could tell you many stories because, after all, I am a Hungarian Jew. And to this day I try to understand what happened. If ever there was a tragedy that could have been prevented, it was that one.^{xv}

In early 1944 Hungary was the only remaining European country with any sizable Jewish population still essentially unaffected by the "final solution." By this time the Nazis had gathered considerable experience, and they were prepared to solve the Jewish question in Hungary with speed and relative ease. On March 19 German troops moved into Budapest ,

where they dictated the installment of a new government under Döme Sztójay, who could be relied on to carry out their policies. Ghettos were established and Jews were forced to wear yellow stars. Jews were arrested and concentrated at centers throughout the country. On May 15, 1944, the first trainload of Hungarian Jews was on its way to the concentration camp at Auschwitz.^{xvi} By July 8 a significant portion of the operation had been carried out: according to the report of the German ambassador in Budapest, 437,402 persons had been deported from Hungary. This figure represented more than half of the Jewish population in Hungary and included people of all ages, most of them taken to Auschwitz within a period of about eight weeks.^{xvii} Upon arrival, a very high percentage of the deportees was immediately killed in the gas chambers; the rest was assigned work in the camp or moved to other camps, but many met their deaths shortly thereafter.

Even before German armed forces occupied Hungary, Adolf Eichmann set into motion the operation to deport Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. On March 12, several days before the head of the Hungarian government, the regent of Hungary, Admiral Miklós (Nicholas) von Horthy, first learned of Hitler's intentions, Eichmann summoned SS officers of his department to meet in Linz. At this time he announced that Hungary was about to be occupied, and he outlined the process of liquidating the Jews as a "full-scale Blitz campaign."^{xviii} Preparations for this operation had been in progress for some time, and Auschwitz was an active participant as early as January. New railway tracks were being built in a direct line to the crematoria. New trenches were being dug to bury corpses. The Nazi guards joked about the Hungarian salami that would soon be available in generous amounts. These developments influenced Vrba to find a way out of the death camp.

For almost two years I had thought of escape, first because I wanted my freedom; then in a more objective way because I wanted to tell the world what was happening in Auschwitz, but now I had an imperative reason. It was no longer a question of reporting a crime, but of preventing one; of warning the Hungarians, of rousing them, of raising an army one million strong, an army that would fight rather than die.^{xix}

Ironically, the Nazi preparations to receive the flood of Hungarians made it possible to carry out Vrba's escape. Members of the Auschwitz underground realized that a large pile of planks assembled to build a new receiving ramp offered a possible hiding place an essential component in an elaborate escape scheme. Prisoners engaged in the delivery of the planks were bribed to leave an opening in the huge pile of wood, resulting in a hiding place for as many as four persons.

The planks were in the outer camp, which at night was undefended because all prisoners were securely behind the high voltage wires and the watch towers of the inner camp. If they could remain hidden for the three days while all the guards stood to and the place was searched, they had a good chance; for at the end of three days it would be assumed that they had got beyond the confines of Auschwitz and the job of finding them would be handed over to the authorities there. The guard that surrounded the entire camp for those three days would be withdrawn and they would merely have to wait until night before sneaking past the unmanned outer watch towers.^{xx}

The first four men attempting to escape in this manner were captured by German troops outside Auschwitz and returned to the camp. But efforts of the authorities to extract the secret of the escape failed, so there was still hope for others. Vrba and Wetzler were then able to carry out the same plan and successfully elude all German troops surrounding the camp. On April 9 a telegram from SS Officer Hartenstein reported to the Berlin Gestapo office that Vrba and Wetzler had escaped two days before and that Himmler himself had been informed of the matter.^{xxi} After about ten days of adventurous marching to the south the two young Slovaks reached the Czechoslovak village of Skalite and then continued on to Zilina. Here they were able to contact a few surviving Jewish leaders and to begin to tell their story.^{xxii}

Oscar Krasnansky (Krasznyansky), a chemical engineer and Zionist leader, met the two escapees and arranged for a German translation of the report that resulted from his interviews. Before their report was actually written down, Vrba and Wetzler related their experiences in the Slovak language separately. Soon it became evident that the witnesses of the extermination camp were reliable. The two independent accounts were combined, and details were added whenever one of the two men could supply details of matters that the other had not experienced. In this manner a lengthy report came into being, simultaneously in Slovakian and in German. It was completed on April 26.^{xxiii}

Both Vrba and Wetzler managed to survive by having several jobs that spared them of death, for significant periods as “scribes,” performing primarily clerical work. They had more freedom than others in moving about in the camp and observing incoming transports. From a very early stage they were able to commit to memory the dates and numbers and sizes of transports (including names of persons in specific transports), their countries of origin, the

numbers selected for work in the camp and for death in the gas chambers, the processing, tattooing, disinfecting, executions, “selections,” “quarantine” arrangements, gassings, and cremation.. The report describes the size and location of all buildings, the gas chambers, disguised as bath houses, connected to the crematoria (shown also in sketches), the relationship of the old camp to the new one (Birkenau), the positions of the double fences, and the inner and outer belts of watch towers. The administrative structure is outlined, showing at the lower levels the crucial role of the block leaders, and the capos who were in charge of small work units. The report concludes with a summary of the transports and the totals of killed in Auschwitz in the period from April 1942 to April 19944: Poland (shipped by trucks) ca. 300,000; Poland (shipped by trains) 600,000; Holland 100,000; Greece 45,000’ France 150,000; Belgium 50,000; Germany 60,000; Yugoslavia, Italy, Norway 50,000; Lithuania 50,000; Bohemia, Moravia, Austria 30,000; Slovakia 30,000; various camps of foreign Jews in Poland 300,000, coming to a total of ca. 1,765,000. Maria Szekeley, who later translated the report in Budapest, observed: “In contrast to the trickling news items available, the report revealed the total and terrible reality of the extermination of human beings, organized methodically and pedantically, planned as a crime of massive proportions. . . This report is exempt from feeling; the text is dry, as if the authors simply wrote about how one should bake bread . . .”^{xxiv}

The crucial step of distribution followed immediately after the completion of the report. Krasnansky recalls that the report was sent to Rudolf Kastner in Budapest, Nathan Schwalb in Geneva, and the liaison committee in Istanbul. One copy was handed to the papal nuncio [Giuseppe Burzio] in Bratislava to be forwarded to the Vatican. Independently of Krasnansky’s

addressees, a copy also reached the underground in Budapest. The path and impact of each of these copies, though complex, can be reconstructed.

Dr. Rudolf Kastner (Rezső Kasztner), a lawyer and deputy chairman of the Hungarian Zionist Organization, offered a direct line of communication to the potential victims of extermination. After Vrba and Wetzler had reported to Slovakian Jewish leaders about Auschwitz, these leaders assured the escapees that they were in daily contact with the Hungarian Jewish leaders and that the report about Auschwitz would be in their hands "first thing tomorrow." The following day Vrba was told that Kastner, "the most important man" in Hungarian Jewish affairs, was examining the report "at this very minute."^{xxv} He was expected to get the report to the head of the Hungarian state and the head of the Catholic Church in Hungary. But the expectation of results from Kastner's involvement proved to be futile. He did not help to inform Hungarian Jews of the fate that awaited them. The argument used by Jewish leaders to justify the silence about the Auschwitz report was the fear of panic.^{xxvi} But for Kastner another consideration militated for silence. Because he was negotiating at this time with the Gestapo about a German offer to exchange the lives of Jews for goods and money, the circulation of the report evidently threatened to undermine his work with the Nazis. Although he kept the report secret in the hope of saving lives, Kastner became in a sense an accomplice in a conspiracy of silence. Eichmann himself referred later to a "gentlemen's agreement" with Kastner, who allegedly agreed to remain silent and to "help keep the Jews from resisting deportation and even keep order in the collection camps" in exchange for the opportunity to rescue fifteen to twenty thousand Jews. With Rudolf Kastner the Auschwitz report reached a dead end.

The report arrived in Budapest at the end of April or, at the latest, during the first few days of May. Although it is not clear who took one of the copies prepared in Bratislava to Hungary and how it found its way into the hands of a representative of the Hungarian resistance movement, Dr. Géza Soós (consultant at the Hungarian Foreign Ministry), it is, nevertheless, a fact that for the history of Jews in Hungary this particular report was decisive.

Interviews conducted by the Hungarian journalist Sándor Szenes in 1981 with four participants of the dramatic events of subsequent days, follow the path of this particular text. The interviews reconstruct the essential features of the actions that the report inspired. Together with the text of the report, the interviews provide a solid documentary basis for the answers to crucial questions: What did Hungarian leaders learn about Auschwitz and when? How did they react? Did they take decisive action? If not, why not?

How Hungarian leaders evaluated the news from Auschwitz and how they reacted to the report cannot be isolated from the history of repressive measures imposed on the Jewish population even before the German occupation. Regent Horthy came to power after World War I, and reacted to the presence of Jews in the Communist government it replace with a campaign of anti-Semitism.^{xxvii} Later, responding to increasing pressure from the German government, even church leaders were implicated in the moves to restrict the rights of Jews. With the support of Catholics as well as Protestants, the anti-Semitic laws of 1938-1939 dictated restrictions on the lives of Jews. About 100,000 Christian Jews were classified simply as Jews. When extermination threatened all persons designated as Jews in 1944, church leaders were prevented--by the laws that they had helped to create--from decisive action to

save even the Christian Jews.^{xxviii} Those who participated in actions against Jews were not likely to become their fervent protectors.

According to József Éliás in his interview with Sándor Szenes, the opposition movement in Nazi-occupied Hungary had believed that church leaders were in the best position to undertake rescue efforts at a time when the government was collaborating with the Nazis. The first addressees of the Auschwitz report included, therefore, the leaders of the Catholic, Calvinist, and Lutheran churches. Calvinist Bishop László Ravasz emerges as the leader most convinced that an immediate response was essential. According to Éliás, Bishop Ravasz wrote to Prime Minister Sztójay as early as May 17, warning him about the deportations being, in effect, mass killings and genocide. In the name of Protestant churches, Bishop Ravasz implored the government to stop the atrocities, but the letter also declared that for the time being the issue would not be brought to the public's attention.^{xxix} Bishop Ravasz also wrote to Catholic Cardinal Serédi about a public stand about the "inhumane methods" in handling the "Jewish question." But he set as a precondition for this public declaration an effort by a delegation of churches to warn government leaders. Cardinal Serédi did not cooperate.^{xxx} Since Serédi represented the largest segment of the Hungarian population, his cooperation was essential. The interviews demonstrate that he resisted efforts to take a public stand. Ravasz also made an effort to convince Horthy about the seriousness of the situation. Géza Soós, who played a key role in the transmission of the Auschwitz report to state and church leaders in Budapest, described Horthy's crisis in his interview with American intelligence officers. Soós had escaped from Hungary in December of 1944. Besides bringing a copy of the Auschwitz Report, he provided the US Army Intelligence unit in Italy (OSS) with details about the political situation in

Hungary and the question of the deportations. Soós asserted that upon learning the purpose of the deportations Bishop Ravasz went directly to Horthy at the end of May.

[Ravasz] asked Horthy if he knew what crimes were being committed in his name. The Regent replied that the Germans had asked for a half a million Hungarian workers to be sent to German war plants and that Sztójay had asked the Germans to take Jews instead of Hungarians. Both Sztójay and Veessenmayer had stated that Hitler promised that these Jews would be treated exactly as Hungarian workers. The Regent had asked how long it was intended to keep these workers in Germany, adding that it was not wise to separate providers from their families. Sztójay replied that the Germans understood this and had asked that only entire families should be sent there. When Ravasz insisted that the Jews were being mistreated, the Regent became angry and informed the Bishop that he was not accustomed to having his word questioned. The Regent ended the interview by suggesting to Ravasz that he see Sztójay.^{xxxii}

About the time of Bishop Ravasz's visit a "Memorandum on the Situation of the Hungarian Jewry," dated May 25, 1944, reached Horthy. It contained details about the concentration of Jews in ghettos and factories.^{xxxii}

If Bishop Ravasz did not appear to convince Horthy of the seriousness of the situation, Horthy's statements only a few days later, in early June, show that he had acquired new information and reflect a dramatic shift. At this time, Horthy complained to Prime Minister Sztójay that the measures against the Jews in Hungary were brutal and inhumane.

Among the measures is the treatment of the Jewish problem in a manner of not conforming to the Hungarian mind, nor corresponding to conditions in Hungary, and in turn to Hungarian interests. Above all, it is clear that I was not in a position to prevent anything that was a German measure in this line, or a government measure enacted on German demand, so that in this respect I was forced to a passive attitude. Although in this way not only I could obtain no advance knowledge of the measures taken, but even subsequently I was not informed of everything, nevertheless of late I have received information to the effect that in many respects more had been done here than even by the Germans themselves, partly in such a brutal, and sometimes inhuman manner as has not even been done in Germany.^{xxxiii}

Horthy told Sztójay that certain categories of Jews, including converts and those valuable for the national economy (engineers, doctors, and technicians) be exempted from the anti-Jewish measures. Although he did not demand an end to the deportations nor did he imply that he had knowledge of the death camps, Horthy’s new position suggests that he was acting under the influence of the Vrba-Wetzler report and the fact that others were also aware of it. We know from the Szenes interviews that he had received the report by late May or early June.^{xxxiv}

Within the government there were those who realized that it was no longer possible to remain silent about the report. On June 21, Deputy Foreign Minister Mihály Arnóthy-Jungerth informed the Hungarian Council of Ministers that he had in his possession materials according

to which the Hungarian Jews were being taken to Auschwitz where they were gassed and burned.^{xxxv}

Pressures on Regent Horthy to stop the inhumane treatment of the Jews began to mount. As a result of the news about Auschwitz from Switzerland, where in the meantime the Vrba-Wetzler report had become known, world leaders addressed warnings to Horthy; at the end of June he received stern messages from Pope Pius XII and King Gustav V of Sweden. A warning from the US Legation in Budapest, which referred to a statement by President Roosevelt, stated: "Hungary's fate will not be like that of any other civilized nation . . . unless the deportations are stopped."^{xxxvi} The major item of discussion at the June 26 Crown Council meeting was the domestic and international protest against Jewish persecution. As a result, for the first time at the highest governmental level a desire to halt the deportations was expressed. When government officials (including Prime Minister Sztójay) attempted to defend the German policies, Horthy exclaimed: "I shall not permit the deportations to bring further shame on the Hungarians!"^{xxxvii}

The sequence of events shows that Horthy acted decisively only after stern warnings about this matter came from the Allies, neutral nations, and the Vatican. If Regent Horthy finally took a stand against the deportations, this decision was strongly influenced by the pressure from foreign powers and by the belief that Germany was on the verge of defeat. When Horthy finally went to the German ambassador on July 4 with a demand to end the deportations, he referred to the international uproar as a reason to do so. Veessenmayer reported to Berlin on July 6 that both Horthy and his Prime Minister had complained to him about being deluged with telegrams from many parts of Europe urging him to stop the

deportations. Sztójay also complained that the Allies were planning "to bomb collaborating Hungarian and German agencies" in Budapest.^{xxxviii} It is necessary, therefore, to take into account how the Auschwitz report reached the West and what impact it had there, and how the information served to put pressure on the Hungarian government..

Nathan Schwalb, to whom the report had been sent to Switzerland, was a delegate of the Jewish Agency or the Histadrut ha Ovdim [Hehalutz]. According to Krasnansky, secret messengers were available to take the report “very reliably” to Schwalb.^{xxxix} The fate of this report--especially the different paths it took, leading to actions or failures to act--had profound implications for Hungary. What happened to the earliest versions of the report sent to Nathan Schwalb is not entirely clear. Schwalb, who was active in encouraging resistance to the Nazis in Eastern Europe,^{xi} was reluctant for unexplained reasons, to publicize the news about Auschwitz. It is possible that he received a version of the report even as early as May, at which time it could have played a more effective part in rescue efforts in the West.^{xii} At the very latest, on June 10, the Vrba-Wetzler report arrived in Geneva at the Czech government-in-exile offices, where, Dr. Jaromir Kopecky, recognizing its significance, immediately contacted Gerhard Riegner of the World Jewish Council, and together they mounted a campaign of telegram communications to British and American authorities. In this way Allen Dulles, head of United States Intelligence in Switzerland, received information about Auschwitz and passed it on to Roswell McClelland, War Refugee Board representative in Bern. McClelland cabled the information on to Washington on June 16.^{xlii}

Another copy of the report, addressed originally to Istanbul, eventually found its way to Budapest. Moshe (Miklós) Krausz, head of the Palestine office in Budapest, received a copy of

the Auschwitz report from József Reisner, a Jewish employee of the Turkish legation in Budapest. Krausz took immediate steps to get the information to Switzerland by entrusting Florian Manoliu, a member of the Rumanian legation in Bern, who in turn delivered it to Georges Mantello (György Mandel), originally a businessman from Transylvania, serving as first secretary of the general consulate of El Salvador in Geneva. Mantello reproduced and disseminated it immediately.^{xliii}

The form in which people received such information could be decisive. It appears that previously Dulles had seen only a brief telegram summary of the report. A few days later Walter Garrett, a representative of the British news agency Exchange Telegraph, who had received a copy from Mantello showed it to Allen Dulles. He said that Dulles read the report in his presence, and Garrett observed his profound shock. "One has to do something immediately." With these words Dulles prepared to send a cable to the secretary of state. He reportedly wired it on the following day, June 23.^{xliv} As a result of Kopecky's and Mantello's communications, the veil of secrecy was lifted. In the following days no less than 383 articles about the Auschwitz death camp appeared in the Swiss press.^{xlv}

It is reasonable to assume that the report sent by Giuseppe Burzio from Bratislava on May 22 to the Vatican should not have reached the addressee in a reasonable time. Mario Martilotti, a member of papal nuncio’s office in Bern, interviewed Rudolf Vrba and Czeslaw Mordowicz (who escaped from Auschwitz shortly after Vrba) for six hours on June 20. Before he left for Switzerland, he promised to do everything in his power to stop the killing in Auschwitz. Erich Kulka believes that Martilotti’s report to the Vatican was the catalyst for the

telegram Pius XII addressed to Horthy.^{xlvi} At any rate, the increasing international attention to the Auschwitz report was undoubtedly a factor in influencing Pope Pius XII to address a telegram to Regent Horthy on June 25, demanding efforts to prevent the further suffering of so many unfortunate human beings.^{xlvii}

Only on July 3 did information from the Vrba-Wetzler report receive attention in the *New York Times*. At this time the United States government initiatives in response to the report were behind closed doors. Only at a very late stage, after a period of more than four months, did the War Refugee Board make reports about Auschwitz public. On November 26 the *New York Times* reported on a news conference of the War Refugee Board. This front-page story describes the publication as the "first detailed report by a United States Government Agency offering eyewitness proof of mass murder by the Germans."

This publication is of special relevance since the U.S. government, in contrast to those in Europe, was in a position to act swiftly to stop the death camp operations. A proposal to achieve this end by bombing the railroad lines leading to Auschwitz was sent to authorities as early as May 1944. This plea, clearly a direct consequence of the revelations of Vrba and Wetzler, originated from the underground in Bratislava. On May 17 the message reached Isaac Sternbuch, representative of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis in Switzerland, who forwarded it to the American legation in Bern. Sternbuch continued to receive further pleas from Bratislava, and he repeatedly requested the Bern legation to relay his messages.^{xlviii}

Jacob Rosenheim, a New York representative of the Agudas Israel World Organization, in possession of information about the "final solution" and deportations in progress in Hungary, contacted high United States officials with a proposal to bomb

railroad lines in Kosice and Presov. On June 24 John W. Pehle, executive director of the World Refugee Board, personally took Rosenheim's proposal to John McCloy, the assistant secretary of war. Two days later the operations division of the War Department general staff stated that the proposal was impracticable and "could be executed only by diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations."^{xlix} In fact, on July 3, when McCloy received a memorandum on the bombing proposal, he gave clear instructions to "kill" the proposal.^l

The War Refugee Board first received the full text of the combined Auschwitz reports only on November 1, 1944. The revelations of these first-hand reports and their "horror jolted the Board."^{li} At this late stage there is record of a new effort by a "shocked" Pehle to persuade McCloy to arrange for bombing Auschwitz. But again McCloy rejected the proposal.

In retrospect, there is general agreement that bombing railroad lines to Auschwitz would have been an effective rescue effort. Why did such bombing not take place? Roosevelt established the War Refugee Board on January 22, 1944 to take urgent action "to forestall the plan of the Nazis to exterminate all Jews and minorities in Europe."^{lii} If it was the Board's duty to consult the president and to get his support to demand action from the War Department, the sequence of events in Washington shows a lack of swift communication or consultation. The Department of War preferred silence. McCloy was not persuaded that the atrocity stories were true. His department consistently resisted the use of military forces in rescue operations and also opposed the publication of the Auschwitz reports.^{liii} In light of the failure of the civilian government to be insistent and assertive, the pragmatic military position prevailed.

Because a significant change in the position of the War Refugee Board occurred after the full texts of the Auschwitz reports became available, it is important to know why the "new" evidence was not available earlier. Officials in Switzerland had much of this evidence in the middle of June, but they sent mere summaries to Washington. Only about four months after they had arrived in Switzerland, on October 12, did Roswell McClelland mail them to the War Refugee Board in the United States. In addition to the report by Vrba and Wetzler, he sent the reports of three other escapees from Auschwitz: the accounts of Mordowicz-Rosin and the "Polish Major" (Jerzy Tabeau)^{liv}. Translation of the reports from German into English and mailing may explain the long delay in part, but McClelland, who had sent cables on the reports before, clearly did not consider getting the reports to Washington an urgent matter; he was not aware that the reports were essential for building a convincing case for rescue operations.^{lv} Thus, the resistance of the War Department was not the only cause of inaction; lack of urgency and swift communication were factors. A significant opportunity to save the lives of those destined for the Auschwitz gas chambers to passed by.

Regent Horthy took decisive action in July to save the Jewish population still residing in Budapest. On July 6, Horthy prevented 3,000-4,000 gendarmes, who were to help carry out the deportations from Budapest, from entering the city by a show of military force. He also ordered a halt to the Hungarian participation in the deportations.^{lvi} Horthy turned to reliable military officers and acted decisively to take control. He appointed a new commander for all forces in Budapest. He instructed him to take all measures necessary to prevent the deportations of the Budapest Jews and to

protect the security of the country.^{lvii} He demanded the dismissal of all government officials who had a role in the deportations.^{lviii}

Later events showed that Horthy was unable to follow up his temporary success with actions that would put him firmly in control. A coup d'état deposed Horthy in October; with the encouragement and aid of German authorities his government was replaced by one sympathetic to Nazi racial policies. Many Jews subsequently became victims of mass killings in death marches organized by the fanatically anti-Semitic regime of Ferenc Szálasi. At this time the heroic efforts of Raoul Wallenberg were able to save many lives. The fact remains: The Deportations never resumed. The majority of the Jewish population in Budapest was rescued.

The halting of the deportation in July, as late as it occurred, was an event of major significance. Hitler had expressed his firm intention to retain his occupational forces in Hungary until the "Jewish question" was totally solved.^{lix} The intention to liquidate the Jews remaining in Budapest was not abandoned even after Horthy's action, and Ambassador Veessenmayer had instructions from Berlin to prepare the resumption of the deportations. But Hitler's plans had suffered a major setback, and this state of affairs may be attributed largely to the pressure of foreign governments and to the deteriorating military situation for Germany. The Auschwitz report played a crucial role in this turn of events by influencing them from within Budapest when he was able to read the text first-hand, as well from the outside when he realized that the Allies were in possession of the same information.

A coordinated effort by the Christian leaders to enlighten the public through proclamations in the churches appears to have been a dangerous option but, under the circumstances, the most realistic one within Hungary at least to slow down, if not to stop, the

deportations even earlier. Jenö Lévai has argued that Catholic leaders--Pope Pius XII in particular--did not remain silent. Lévai points out that Pope Pius XII and his representatives did lodge protests with the Hungarian government.^{lx} It is true that the apostolic nuncio in Hungary, Angelo Rotta, approached, informed, and warned Prime Minister Sztójay about the actions against Jews on four occasions in April and May.^{lxi} But the difficulty with Lévai's evidence is that the protests (treating primarily Christian Jews, to be sure) were not public ones, and since their existence was not general knowledge, they could be ignored by those who collaborated with the Nazis. Szenes's interview with András Zakar shows that Cardinal Serédi, the Hungarian church leader in the best position to voice opposition, finally withdrew a pastoral letter critical of the government's actions. In general, Christian church leaders were intent, at most, on saving mainly Christian Jews, leaving the majority of those threatened without any effective spokesman. The interviews also show that the Hungarian churches were unable and, in part, unwilling to close ranks to lodge a unified public protest in their churches. The Szenes interview provides dramatic evidence that the reluctance of Pope Pius XII to condemn the Nazi extermination program publicly had an effect on the situation in Hungary. Cardinal Seredi insisted his silence was justified since the Pope himself was unwilling to speak out.^{lxii}

Rudolf Vrba has remained convinced that many Jews who were taken to Auschwitz would have attempted to resist, flee, or stop the deportations if the report about the conditions in the camp had been published or distributed immediately in Hungary. Had the Hungarian Jews been aware of the "glowing ovens" they would have boarded the trains less willingly, and the entire operation would have been carried out less swiftly and smoothly.^{lxiii} The swiftness of the Nazi operation, the isolation of the Jews, and the lack of avenues of escape

“The ‘Myth’ and Reality of Rescue from the Holocaust: The Karski–Koestler and Vrba–Wetzler Reports.” *The Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies* 2 (2000), pp. 171–208.

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militated, however, in many cases in embattled Hungary against the translation of knowledge into effective opposition. When, for example, Dr. Alexander Nathan tried to read from a report about Auschwitz to a Jewish labor service unit, "the reaction was awful....[They called me] 'a defeatist, a traitor,' They threatened to turn me in. It was no joke. If not for a few Zionist friends they would have beaten me to the point of death."^{lxiv} When Dr. Imre Varga proposed a partisan war against the Nazis, Samu Stern, a Jewish leader in Budapest, threatened to report him to the Gestapo.^{lxv} Despite the enormous obstacles and risks for those who abandoned passivity, Vrba is certainly correct in his analysis that the key to any kind of rescue mission lay “in breaking the cornerstone of the streamlined mass murder in Auschwitz, i.e., its secrecy.”^{lxvi}

The history of the Auschwitz report shows that these documents had the greatest impact when they were least subjected to abbreviation or interpretation. As a precise and complete account of the situation in Auschwitz, the Vrba-Wetzler report was unprecedented. This document is unique in its objective presentation, precision, and completeness. Like the Karski report, the Vrba-Wetzler report fulfilled all the requirements of immediate credibility and impact. The comprehensive history of the Auschwitz death camp and its operation made it potentially stronger as an instrument of rescue. It placed its initiated readers during the crisis year 1944 in an extraordinary position, especially within Hungary. While with a single stroke eliminating doubts about previously circulating rumors, it imposed a sense of responsibility on those who were now in the possession of reliable knowledge about the death camps. To be sure, the options for those who wished to act on their insight were few, and the risks were considerable. In Hungary the implications entailed a total reevaluation of the political situation

as it was understood up to that time. For the Hungarian leaders, who had helped to shape that political situation, a complete reorientation was not a simple matter.

These leaders had participated in a long-standing politics of anti-Semitism based on the assumption that Jews, Communists, and the Soviets all represented a great threat to national interests. To varying degrees this was a factor in the position of the Polish government-in-exile and even that of Pope Pius XII, who had personally observed with distaste Jewish participation in a Bolshevik uprising.^{lxvii} The widely prevalent tendency to classify Jews with Communists was a factor that favored the Nazi designs; any effort to help the Jews publicly could be seen to weaken the resistance to the Communist threat.

Just as in the case of the Karski and Koestler reports, delays and fragmentation proved detrimental to rescue efforts. If, for example, Nathan Schwalb could have turned to the media immediately after receiving the report, probably in May 1944, the situation could have been greatly different. If at an early point the entire text of the report had been transmitted to Washington, instead of being truncated into short telegrams, the proposed plan to bomb railroad lines to Auschwitz and other camps would have had a better chance against the resistance of military experts unaware of or not interested in the stakes.

When a catastrophe occurs, a search for scapegoats often follows. In response to the tragedy of the Holocaust, honorable and well-meaning people have often stood accused for a part in conspiracies of silence or inaction. In most cases it was less a question of guilt than an inability to adapt to new, risk-laden options. Debates of this nature tend to shift to personalities rather than processes. The potential lesson for future generations, however, might be in learning more about the problems that hindered effective rescue. In face of

entrenched traditions and policies, only a radical reversal, brought about by the immediate communication of new information, could produce significant results

If it is not productive to accuse, in retrospect, political or Church leaders for failing to undertake actions that did not appear to be their own interests, there is perhaps merit in understanding the processes and points in time that could have allowed for realistic alternatives. The history of the Holocaust reports reveals that in a condition of widespread secrecy the entrenched political orientations, leaders will remain unmoved unless confronted by a strong wave of public opinion. How difficult it is to mobilize public opinion in such times becomes evident in the sacrifices and frustrations of the men who tried to do so.

ⁱ William D. Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis* (London: Routledge, 1997)

ⁱⁱ Alexei Tolstoy et alia, *Terror in Europe: The Fate of the Jews* (London: National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, 1943), p. 9.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939-1942* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p 60-61.

^{iv} Tolstoy, p. 11.

^v E. Thomas Wood and Stanislaw M. Jankowski, *Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust* (New York: John Wiley & sons, 1994), p. 116.

^{vi} Jan Karski, *Story of a Secret State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1944), p. 330.

^{vii} Karski, p. 334.

^{viii} Engel, p. p. 198.

^{ix} Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: Henry Holt, 1981), p. 103.

^x Karski, p 327.

^{xi} Karski, p. 335.

^{xii} Wood, pp. 196-201.

^{xiii} David Cesarani, *Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary 1944* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), p. 203; Wood, pp. 179 and 293.

^{xiv} Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler’s “Final solution”* (New York: Henry Holt, 1980), p. 110.

^{xv} In Elie Wiesel's introduction to Randolph L. Braham and Bela Vago (eds.), *The Holocaust in Hungary Forty Years Later* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. xiv. Cf. Elie Wiesel, *Night* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1960).

^{xvi} Gilbert, pp. 181-189 and 207-211. Randolph L. Braham, *Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 2 vols. See also the revised and expanded of 1994.

^{xvii}Edmund Veessenmayer, an SS officer transferred to the German foreign office and ambassador ("Reich plenipotentiary") in Hungary during the period of German occupation in 1944–1945, reported regularly on the progress of the deportations. At an early point Veessenmayer became a fervent advocate of tackling the "Jewish problem" in Hungary in a radical way. His reports of April 30 and December 10, 1943 helped to set the stage for the invasion of Hungary and the massive deportation of Jews to Auschwitz. Elek Karsai, "Edmund Veessenmayer's Reports to Hitler on Hungary in 1943," *The New Hungarian Quarterly* 5 (1964), 146–153. Some of Veessenmayer's reports (only for April 15–June 29) have been edited in English translation in: Arieh Ben-Tov, *Facing the Holocaust in Budapest. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Jews in Hungary, 1943–1945* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1988), pp. 417–422.

^{xviii}Jenő Lévai, *Eichmann in Hungary* (Budapest: Pannonia, 1961), p. 64. Lévai refers to I.M.T. (*Prozeß gegen die Kriegsverbrecher vor dem internationalen Militärgerichtshof*), Blue Series, IV, page 407.

^{xix}Rudolf Vrba and Alan Bestic, *Escape from Auschwitz. I Cannot Forgive* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), p. 198, originally published under the title *I Cannot Forgive* in London in 1964, also appeared with an afterword by John S. Conway as 44070. *The Conspiracy of the Twentieth Century* (Bellingham, Washington: Star & Cross, 1989). Like Vrba, Wetzler insists that one reason for the determination to escape from Auschwitz was to warn the Hungarian Jews. Péter Bokor, "Interjú Wetzlerrel" (Interview with Alfred Wetzler), *Látóhatár* (1981), 188

^{xx}Vrba and Bestic, *I Cannot Forgive*, p. 221.

^{xxi}Cf. Gilbert, illustration no. 22 and p. 196.

^{xxii}Gilbert, p. 203.

^{xxiii}John Conway, "Frühe Augenzeugenberichte aus Auschwitz. Glaubwürdigkeit und Wirkungsgeschichte," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 27 (1979), pp. 267–269; Gilbert, pp. 203–204.

^{xxiv}Sándor Szenes and Frank Baron, *Die verschwiegene Warnung* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994), pp. 68–69.

^{xxv}Vrba and Bestic, p. 250. Rudolf Kastner recalled details about the gas chambers and crematoria in Auschwitz from reports that originated from Bratislava, probably from Vrba and Wetzler. Rudolf Kastner, *Der Kastner-Bericht* (München: Kindler, 1961), p. 82.

^{xxvi}Ernö Munkácsi, who worked closely with other Jewish leaders, reports that at first the Auschwitz report was being copied in great secrecy so that panic should not result ("hogy pánikot ne keltsenek"). Ernő Munkácsi, *Hogyan történt? Adatok és okmányok a Magyar zsidóság tragédiájához* (Budapest: Szikra, 1947), p. 111.

^{xxvii}In responding to the reproach that he was too mild in his treatment of the Jews, Horthy wrote to the Führer in 1943 that he was the first in Europe to speak out "against the destructive attitude of the Jews." Braham, II, p. 717.

^{xxviii}Sándor Szenes, "Auschwitz: Christians and Jews," *Hungarian Books*, (1984), 14–16. See also Szenes's comprehensive treatment of the Auschwitz topic in relationship to Hungary *Befejezetlen múlt* [Unfinished Past] (Budapest, 1986). Bishop Ravasz's speech in support of anti-Jewish legislation in 1938 is evidence of his earlier position. See Szenes, p. 94. Cf. István Konya, *A Magyar református egyház felső vezetés politikai ideológiája a Horthy-Korszakban* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967), pp. 185–196.

^{xxix}Bishop Ravasz approached Horthy as early as April 12 and 28 about the actions of the government against Jews and converts. Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, p. 1041.

^{xxx}Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, p. 1042.

^{xxxi}Elek Karsai, "Soós Géza és Hadnagy Domokos tájékoztatása a magyarországi helyzetről és a Magyar Függetlenségi Mozgalomról 1944 decemberében," in: *A Ráday Gyűjtemény IV-V. 1984–1985* (Budapest, 1985) p. 253. Cf. p. 240.

^{xxxii}Miklós Szina and László Szücs, *The Confidential Papers of Admiral Horthy* (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1963), pp. 296–298.

^{xxxiii}Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, 745.

^{xxxiv}Szenes and Baron, p. 91.

^{xxxv}Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, p. 746.

Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, p. 754, 1110 and 1136.

^{xxxvii}Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, p. 755.

^{xxxviii}Gilbert, p. 206.

^{xxxix}Erich Kulka, "Five Escapes from Auschwitz," p. 207. According to Kulka, in a supplement to the report, Krasnansky urged governments of the Allies to "destroy the Auschwitz crematoriums and approaching roads."

^{x^l}Joel Brand, a Jewish leader who is famous because of his negotiations with Eichmann about Jews for trucks, described Schwalb's activism: "Nathan Schwalb, one of the few Zionists remaining Switzerland, had written to us in

Hebrew urging us to join forces with the Hungarian opposition, the Liberals and the Social-Democrats, and organize a joint resistance movement. We were to set up partisan groups and carry out acts of sabotage behind the enemy's lines. He sent us a list of Hungarian politicians on whom we could rely, and said that if we undertook these tasks he would be able to send us an unlimited amount of Allied money. . . . Nathan Schwalb evidently had no idea of what had taken place in Budapest, in spite of the dozens of factual reports we had sent abroad. He believed that through his mediation we would be able to get help from the Hungarian politicians he had named, whereas, in fact, it was these same politicians who were coming to us for assistance." Alex Weissberg, *Advocate for the Dead. The Story of Joel Brand* (London: Deutsch, 1956), p. 98.

^{xli} It is not clear what happened to the Yiddish version of the report sent to Switzerland (to Schwalb?) in May. Gilbert, p. 216. A deposition of Richard Lichtheim, the Jewish Agency representative in Geneva, dated June 23, 1944, complains that Schwalb was not cooperative. Schwalb had expressed dissatisfaction about not being sufficiently consulted in the matter relating to Kopecky's efforts to publicize the Auschwitz report, which according to Lichtheim, arrived on June 10, originally addressed to Nathan Schwalb. (I am grateful to the Archives in Auschwitz for sending me a copy of Lichtheim's statement.) Nathan Schwalb's correspondence has its home in the Labor Movement Archives in Tel Aviv, but up to recently it has been closed to use by scholars. In response to my questions, Schwalb wrote on August 1, 1994 that he received the report and set in on to Stephan Wise, the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, and Professor Brodetsky in London. But Schwalb did not respond to my questions about the date of the receipt of the report or when he sent it. Roswell McClelland confirms in his letter of October 12 that the Auschwitz reports that he was transmitting to Washington, obtained from Kopecky, were originally addressed to Nathan Schwalb. Wyman, *America and the Holocaust*, vol. 12, p. 75.

^{xlii} Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, pp. 712-713.

^{xliii} Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, 712-713. Moshe Krausz was in possession of information from the Vrba-Wetzler report as early as June 6 and he was trying to get this information to Jerusalem. Ben-Tov, pp. 149-150.

^{xliiv} Walter Laqueur and Richard Breitman, *Breaking the Silence* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), pp. 98-99; Arie Ben-Tov, pp. 76-77.

^{xlv} Werner Rings, *Advokaten des Feindes* (Wien: Econ-Verlag, 1966), pp. 140-146.

^{xlvi} Kulka, p. 302.

^{xlvii} Conway, pp. 277-278.

^{xlviii} There were numerous desperate communications from Bratislava. The secretly coded telegrams of May 16 and 24 have survived in the archives of the War Refugee Board. Both urgently requested bombing of railway lines to Poland. Isaac Sternbuch consulted the Bern office of the War Refugee Board about these requests. On May 25 Roswell McClelland showed Steinbuch's message about bombing to Colonel de Jong, military attaché at the Bern legation, to obtain an expert's view before forwarding the message from Bern to the United States. David S. Wyman, who edited these documents, is not certain whether these first pleas were "blocked" in Bern or in Washington. Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann (a leader of an illegal organization operating within the Bratislava Jewish Council), probably the authors of the messages that Sternbuch forwarded, sent a letter requesting bombing from Bratislava on May 22. This letter of four pages--clearly not the first sent by Weissmandel and Fleischmann on this subject--provides a detailed report of the first stage of the deportations from Hungary and includes details about the extermination camp of Auschwitz based on the testimonies of the escapees. Although this letter also found its way into the archives of the War Refugee Board, it is not clear when and how. The texts of these messages are reproduced in David S. Wyman: *America and the Holocaust*. Amherst 1989. Vol. 12, S. 82-87 and 94-97. David S. Wyman, "Why Auschwitz Was Never Bombed," *Commentary* 65 (1978), 37-38 and *The Abandonment of the Jews. America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 288-307. Both Weissmandel and Fleischmann were arrested in the fall of 1944 and deported to Auschwitz. Weissmandel escaped from the train, but Fleischmann died in an Auschwitz gas chamber.

^{xlix} Gilbert, p. 238. Before serving on the board, Pehle was assistant secretary of treasury. He and his colleagues were responsible for uncovering deliberate attempts in the State Department to suppress information about the "final solution." Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970), pp. 239-240 and 245. On the day when Pehle received the summarized report from both McClelland and the Czech authorities in London, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden obtained a summary from Stockholm and Geneva. After being exposed to the Vrba-Wetzler report, Churchill and Eden were in agreement that bombing strikes should be made, but they were informed that the railways were beyond the reach of British planes and that capacity for a nighttime raid against Auschwitz was lacking. Monty Noam Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable. Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 192-193 and 196.

ⁱJohn Mendelsohn, *The Holocaust. Relief and Rescue of Jews from Nazi Oppression, 1943-1945* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982), vol. 14, p. 119.

ⁱⁱWyman, *The Abandonment*, p. 41.

ⁱⁱⁱThe War Refugee Board was to be made up of the secretaries of state, treasury, and war, forming part of the executive office, and it was to be responsible for reporting to the president at frequent intervals. Gilbert, p. 172. To assess Pehle’s actions cf. Gilbert, pp. 237-238, 248, 255-256, 312, 320-321, 327-328; and David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, pp. 38-41.

ⁱⁱⁱEven as late as December 1944 McCloy expressed disbelief about death camps. Kai Bird, *The Chairman: John J. McCloy, the Making of the American Establishment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 206. Cf. pp. 201-227. McCloy as the U.S. high commissioner in Germany after the war made decisions in war crimes cases indicating a lack of sensitivity to the plight of the victims of persecution. He acted, for example, to reduce the sentence of Veessenmayer, who played a central role in deportations in Hungary. Veessenmayer, who at the Nuremberg trials received a sentence of twenty-five years, was a free man in 1951. Gerald Reitlinger, *The SS: Alibi of a Nation. 1922-1945* (New York: Viking, 1957), p. 353. See a discussion of McCloy’s controversial decisions in Heiner Lichtenstein, *Warum Auschwitz nicht bombardiert wurde* (Colgone: Bund, 1980), pp. 97-114. Pehle and the War Review Board did not act on a proposal in September to approach the president. According to Wyman there is no evidence that President Roosevelt was ever approached on the question of bombing Auschwitz. Wyman, pp. 288-307. After publishing the Auschwitz reports, Pehle was called to task by the Office of War Information for not obtaining the approval of that office. He was told that it was not advisable to publish it. Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945* (Bloomington, IN: University Press, 1987), pp. 201-202. Cf. pp. 219-221 & 247.

^{liv}Tabeau escaped from Auschwitz in November 1943 and prepared a report before Vrba and Wetzler escaped. On the way to England, he arrived in Budapest in March 1944, just as the Nazis invaded Hungary. Tabeau, a retired cardiologist in Cracow, asserted in an interview with me in 1996 that he had no chance to communicate with Hungarians about his report. Because of the political circumstances he was forced to return to Poland. Tabeau’s important report was lost for some time, but it came to light in Switzerland, together with the Vrba-Wetzler report, both reports serving to confirm the accuracy of the information about Auschwitz.

^{lv}McClelland’s telegrams to Pehle and the Auschwitz reports are preserved in the War Refugee Board Boxes nos. 6, 34 and 56 of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, N.Y. I am indebted to Richard Breitman for alerting me to the source materials of the Roosevelt Library.

^{lvi}C.A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth. A History of Modern Hungary, 1929-1945* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1957), II, 305. Gilbert, pp. 183-184, and 266. Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, pp. 773-774. John S. Conway, "The Holocaust in Hungary: Recent Controversies and Reconsiderations," in: Randolph L. Braham, *The Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry* (New York: Institute for Holocaust Studies, 1986), pp. 1-48.

^{lvii}Thomas Sakmyster, *Hungary’s Admiral on Horseback. Miklos Horthy, 1918-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 350-380. Mario D. Fenyo, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary. German-Hungarian Relations, 1941-1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 180 and see also pp. 203-204. Macartney, *October 15*, II, p. 305.

^{lviii}Karsai, "Géza Soós and Domokos Hadnagy," p. 255.

^{lix}Braham, *Politics of Genocide*, II, p. 745.

^{lx}Jenő Lévai, *Hungarian Jewry and the Papacy. Pope Pius XII Did Not Remain Silent*. Translated by J.R. Foster (London: Sands, 1967).

^{lxi}Fenyo, p. 194. Rotta presented on May 15 the following note to the Hungarian government: . . . according to information received by the Nuntiature--the Hungarian government is prepared to deport 100,000 persons, even though this deportation be veiled. . . The whole world knows what deportation means in practice." Lévai (Lévai), *Black Book*, p. 197.

^{lxii}Szenes and Baron, p. 95.

^{lxiii}Vrba and Bestic, p. 249, 339, and 353.

^{lxiv}Asher Cohen, *The Halutz Resistance in Hungary. 1942-1944* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986), 130.

^{lxv}Denis Silagi, "A Foiled Venture," in: Braham, *The Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry*, pp. 234-235.

^{lxvi}Vrba and Bestic, p. 353.

^{lxvii}John Cornwell, *Hitler’s Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York: Viking, 1999), pp. 74-75.