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Gábor Kádár, Zoltán Vági. *A végső döntés [The Final Decision]: Berlin, Budapest, Birkenau 1944.* Budapest: Jaffa, 2013. 280 S. ISBN 978-615523557-3.

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G. Kádár u.a.: Berlin, Budapest, Birkenau 1944

The Final Decision, the third co-authored book of GÃ¡bor KÃ¡dÃ¡r and ZoltÃ¡n VÃ¡gi, makes an important contribution to the debate on the genesis of the Holocaust. GÃ¡bor KÃ¡dÃ¡r / ZoltÃ¡n VÃ¡gi, Aranyvonat: fejezetek a zsidÃ³ vagyon tÃ¶rtÃ©netÃ©bÅl, Budapest 2001. GÃ¡bor KÃ¡dÃ¡r/ZoltÃ¡n VÃ¡gi, HullarablÃ¡s: a magyar zsidÃ³k gazdasÃ¡gi megsemmisÃtÃ©se, Budapest 2005. In English, see GÃ¡bor KÃ¡dÃ¡r / ZoltÃ¡n VÃ¡gi, Self-Financing Genocide: The Gold Train, the Becher Case and the Wealth of Hungarian Jews, Budapest 2005. It does so by systematically comparing the testimonies of key German and Hungarian participants and thereby reconstructing in minute detail the decision making process that led to the Hungarian Holocaust in the spring of 1944. Critiquing the previous interpretation of GÃ¶tz Aly and Christian Gerlach in particular (pp. 228â31), KÃ¡dÃ¡r and VÃ¡gi offer a theory of four stages of radicalization that resulted in altogether 437.402 Jews being deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau within a mere 56 days from mid-May to early July 1944, the large majority of whom were murdered upon arrival. GÃ¶tz Aly / Christian Gerlach, Das letzte Kapitel. Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944/45, Stuttgart 2002. The authors emphasize that the genocidal operation from Hungary surpassed the speed of all previous ones and the numbers deported temporarily even exceeded the capacity of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex.

In chapter two, besides providing a brief overview of the international scholarly literature on projects of demographic engineering, ethnic cleansing, mass murder and genocide, KÃ¡dÃ¡r and VÃ¡gi discuss the prehistory of the Nazi EndlÃ¶sung, including recent interpretations of its origins by Christopher Browning, Christian Gerlach and Peter Longerich, among others. In the assessment of the authors, these discussions have shown that there were âdiscontinuous continuitiesâ in Nazi anti-Jewish policy and a multiplicity of decisions led to the Holocaust (p. 59). While showing how projects of ethnic cleansing resulted in mass murder and were gradually transformed into systematic genocide, they also maintain that the Holocaust required a formal âfinal decisionâ in 1941 that launched the encompassing program of extermination (p. 33).

In chapter three, the authors explore the dark side of Hungarian ethnic policies, arguing that besides the influential Hungarian historical tradition of including non-Magyar ethnic groups, there has also been a virulent alternative tradition of exclusion that ultimately culminated in the Holocaust. They highlight the interethnic civil wars and the anti-Semitic pogroms that raged in 1848â49, the countrywide wave of anti-Semitic robberies of 1881â84, the anti-Semitic outbursts accompanying the end of the First World War in 1918, the anti-Jewish murders of the subsequent White Terror and anti-Roma policies and violence in particular.

In accordance with these two preliminary chapters, the central argument of the book is that the Hungarian Holocaust was caused by the fatal meeting of two forces: the Nazi genocidal program and the Hungarian drive toward ethnic homogenization (p. 13). The au-

thors show that in the spring of 1944 the invading Nazis achieved control over Hungary without having to promote a new class of politicians or radically alter the structure of the administration. They explain that a decisive part of the Hungarian political elite took a radical anti-Jewish turn at this point and extremists such as Andor Jaross, LÃ¡szlÃ³ Baky and LÃ¡szlÃ³ Endre took over the Ministry of the Interior. At the same time, they underline that what would follow was not decided yet. Several factors might easily have worked against implementing the Hungarian Holocaust. The Nazis may have wanted to exterminate the third largest Jewish community of Europe in the shortest possible time but they had insufficient resources at their disposal and consequently viewed total deportation as only one among several options.

The authors argue that the unprecedented velocity of the deportation and extermination of Hungarian Jewry was caused by the confluent agendas of Germans and Hungarians and their efficient, even flawless cooperation. They explicate that the close personal contacts between Adolf Eichmann and LÃ¡szlÃ³ Endre in particular not only increased the speed of decision-making but constantly radicalized the results (p. 167). Endre, internationally certainly the much less known of the two, was a pioneer of âbureaucraticâ (i.e. illegal) anti-Semitism during the Horthy era. He became state secretary (Ã¡llamtitkÃ¡r) responsible for urban and county administrations in the Ministry of the Interior in 1944. He was the one to coordinate, first informally and later also formally, the units of the gendarmerie and the police executing ghettoization and deportation.

KÃ¡dÃ¡r and VÃ¡gi identify four crucial stages of the radicalization process. First, Hitler demanded the Nazi EndlÃ¶sung on the eve of the German invasion of Hungary on the 19th of March 1944. In the last days of March, LÃ¡szlÃ³ Endre and Adolf Eichmann prepared a plan of ghettoization but their plans became significantly more radical within days. Shortly after the meeting on the 7th of April colloquially known as the âHungarian Wannsee conferenceâ, the deportation of 100.000 Hungarian Jewish workers to the Reich was agreed. This was essentially a renewal of a demand first articulated in 1942 to support the German war economy. At the same time, the declared goal of using Jewish labor in times of dire need was completely at odds with the actual treatment even of those Hungarian Jews who were not immediately murdered.

Using the calendar of Endre as their key source, KÃ¡dÃ¡r and VÃ¡gi come to the conclusion that a final agreement between the German security forces stationed in Hungary and the leaders of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior was reached on the 22nd of April at the family residence of Endre in SzentkÃºt. As a consequence, not only the goal but also the extent of the operation was radically worsened: in accordance with the plans of Heinrich Himmler, all Hungarian Jews would now be deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau â and those selected to work would be transported further from there (pp. 146â7). On the 25th of April, another major revision of the overall plan was agreed in MÃ¡ramarossziget (Sighetu MarmaÈiei): Endre and Eichmann increased the number of deported per day fourfold to the unprecedented (and not fully workable) rate of 12.000. On the 4th of May, only the logistical details of deportation from Hungary still needed to be agreed in Vienna â and no significant German participation was required for their implementation until Hungarian Jews were handed over to them at the border (pp. 198â9).

The authors highlight that each of these plans were endorsed by MiklÃ³s Horthy and the SztÃ³jay government and enjoyed wide, almost consensual support in Hungary. Rather ironically, the only institution that meaningfully opposed the deportations was the Hungarian army â since it had its own plans to continue exploiting male Jewish laborers (p. 223). The fast adoption of ever more radical plans shows the lack of any serious conflict between the German and Hungarian sides until early July when Horthy finally intervened to stop the deportations. He would also annul attempts to recommence it upon the Romanian coup of the 23rd of August (p. 209). While thousands of Hungarian Jews were killed within Hungary after the Arrow Cross putsch of mid-October and 50 to 60.000 Hungarian Jewish workers were handed over to the Germans to build the SÃ¼dostwall, further deportations were not pursued. Hungarian Nazi leader Ferenc SzÃ¡lasi continued to support Berlin till the very end but opposed Nazi plans towards Hungarian Jews. On Hungarian Nazis, now see Rudolf Paksa, Magyar nemzetiszocialistÃ¡k, Budapest 2013. As KÃ¡dÃ¡r and VÃ¡gi argue, the conservative elite of the Horthy regime in fact collaborated much more enthusiastically in the implementation of the Holocaust than the Arrow Cross (p. 250).

In conclusion, The Final Decision is a pioneering and convincingly argued, even if rather narrowly focused book on the origins of the Hungarian Holocaust. It substantiates the claim that while altogether 4 to 7 percent of all the victims of the Hungarian Holocaust were directly murdered by Hungarians, Hungarian participation in the decision making and implementation of the Hun-

garian Holocaust was essential and responsibility for the Hungarian Holocaust was thus shared between Germans and Hungarians. To what extent this thorough and balanced assessment of the origins of the Hungarian Holocaust will become common knowledge in Hungary, only the future can tell.

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