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## Recent Hungarian University and Secondary School Textbooks on the Holocaust

by  
*László Karsai*

In April 1994, at an international conference held in Budapest on the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust, I concluded my lecture with a thought by Chaim Schatzker. Schatzker had said that schools, textbooks and the whole education system were precisely as good or as bad as the society that had created them. At that time I voiced the view that Hungarian society was not as "bad" as one would expect seeing its history textbooks, and would definitely deserve much better textbooks. When undertaking now to analyze textbooks republished in new, revised editions since 1994 and history textbooks published for the first time for university and secondary education, I am glad to say that the last few years have seen a definite improvement in the standards of Hungarian textbooks. Gyula Hosszú *et alia* have published a secondary school textbook which is "better" than Hungarian society at the moment.

If writing textbooks in Hungary today may not be a profitable enterprise, selling them most certainly is. This may be one of the reasons why masses of textbooks have been published since 1989, when censorship was abolished. Zsuzsa Gáspár, her friends, and colleagues have translated and published a very politically *correct* American book, which cost the Soros Foundation millions of dollars, which might have been put to more deserving uses and indeed, there is the very realistic danger of the book being made available in secondary schools. Nobody will know from this book why racism, antisemitism and the hatred of Gypsies existed and still exist. It says nothing about historical roots or the religious, ideological and sociological causes of these prejudices.

### *Anti-Judaism and antisemitism*

When discussing the antecedents of the Holocaust, one of course does not expect textbooks on twentieth century history to explain the historical and religious roots of modern racist and nationalist antisemitism. But since the American book undertook this job, one is justified in criticizing it for beginning to discuss the subject with a giant historical leap into the Roman era, and the advent of Christianity. Actually, Anti-Judaism existed before Christianity did: non-Christians in Egypt, in the Assyrian and Babylonian empires hated, persecuted, frequently, massacred Jews a great many centuries before Christ. It is true, that Christians in the earliest times were forbidden to have meals or sexual relationships with Jews. It should also, however, be mentioned that Jewish religious laws similarly forbade (and still forbid) most forms of connections with the "*goyim*."

The notion of the *permanently, inexplicably, persecuted Jew* in this textbook negates the fact that the Catholic church did not regard the Jews as heretics, nor did it convert

them, sell them as slaves or massacre them. All this is contrary to what the textbook declares about the Catholic Church, in general, from a liberal/anticlerical, atheist position

Antisemitism will not be more tolerable if we make an effort to understand the causes of its rise, proliferation and current popularity, but it will be easier to fight from a rational position rather than from an emotional one.

Examining the development of modern antisemitism, the textbook cannot find any reasonable explanation or cause except for the stubborn survival of medieval superstitions and religious bigotry. A few causes, however, could be pointed out, based on the voluminous literature. In the wake of the Enlightenment — which, contrary to what the authors believe, was not "invented" in the United States of America with the Declaration of Independence — the Jews were emancipated all over Europe. The Jews, coming out of the ghettos, became the most successful national religious minority in the world. Contrary to the expectations of many of their liberal friends and disproving the fears of many nineteenth-century anti-Semites, a significant number of Jews never assimilated and were never absorbed. They kept their family, business, and social connections. Envy, as a possible motive, is often found at the bottom of antisemitic passions. A great number of Jews became capitalists, bankers and speculators. One could list the names of thinkers from Proudhon to Marx who were anti-Semites on a socialist or class basis.

Since many Jews, who left their religion, became internationalist socialists and anarchists, the right-wing anti-Semites had their eyes on them. On the other hand, the clerical and nationalist anti-Semites resented those Jews who became atheists, liberal, and cosmopolitan, Antisemitism is not homogeneous and what we have are colorful and varied movements.

#### *World War I, Revolutions, Counter-revolutions*

During and after World War I, antisemitism grew stronger all over the world becoming a truly internationalist mass movement. Most of the textbooks do not even attempt to discuss the deeper causes of that.

Hosszú has a cartoon, easy to analyze in class, of the Judeo-Bolsheviks sacrificing *Holy Russia* on the altar of the Communist International, in which Trotsky is holding the knife, and one of the typically Jewish figures around him is holding a bag with the thirty pieces of silver. The explanatory text on the Russian civil war and the pogroms is also informative. It is a pity that the book does not quote those passages from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* where the authors of the brochure "predicted" along with war and the revolutions, the fall of the great monarchies, the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as the Russia of the Tzars. In 1917-1919, many revolutionaries of Jewish origin became well known worldwide, and millions, including Adolf Hitler, believed that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were indeed written at the Zionist world congress in Basle in 1897. Many years would have to pass before it was shown that the document in question was a clever forgery, produced by the Russian and the French secret police services.

#### *The Horthy regime*

All that Salamon tells us, with hardly disguised apologetic intentions, about the ideology of Horthy's regime is that "...it stood on the basis of Christian-national spirituality, pitted first of all against the so-called 'Jewish internationalism' and atheism of 1919."(9) In Salamon's definition, the liberal conservatism of the Horthy regime was a restrictedly liberal attitude. Which reminds one of the well-known adage by Bulgakov, who said there was no such thing as prime-quality fresh fish and second-quality fresh fish, the latter simply being evil-smelling and unfit for human consumption. *Mutatis mutandis*, one is either liberal or an (perchance *restrictedly*) antisemite.

Miklós Szabó already declared decades ago, what the textbook by Benkes, Borsányi and Kende reconfirms, that *Christian* was merely a rhetorical commonplace in the vocabulary of the Horthy regime, meaning *not Jewish*.

Focusing primarily on political and intellectual history, Mária Ormos's book points out, in a fine analysis, why the political activity of the Hungarian middle classes was weak and halfhearted. The great Jewish capitalists were too careful to get involved in politics, but at the same time Jews occupied crucial positions in industry, commerce, the press and the services. Ormos stresses that while groups of Jewish origin and religion maintained dominant roles in the economy after 1919 until 1944, the government would never have a Jewish cabinet minister. This may be one reason why the middle classes, whose strongest section could not participate in politics, was unable to properly protect its interests.

#### *Numerus clausus*

With regard to the first antisemitic piece of legislation in post-World War I Europe, all that Salamon says is that its aim was to reduce the over qualification of professionals and the most important prerequisites considered were national loyalty and moral reliability. Since he then goes on to say that the *Act* put Hungarians of *Jewish origin* at a disadvantage, one could conclude, with just a little cynicism, that it was probably because obviously many Jews and Hungarians were not nationally loyal or morally reliable.

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Tímea Berkes claims that when foreign Jewish organizations turned to the League of Nations, Hungarian Jews turned down their intervention because they were generally against the peace treaty, and unwilling to make use even of the statutes protecting minorities that could be advantageous for them. Mária M. Kovács has shown that the Hungarian Jews refused to appeal for the help of the League of Nations against the *numerus clausus* through their co-religionists abroad in 1920 because they regarded themselves not as a national minority, but as Hungarians following the religion of Moses. It might be illuminating to tell students that the Jews in Poland did ask for the help of the League of Nations, and managed to have the Polish *numerus clausus* repealed. However, while in Hungary the number of university and college students of Jewish religion did not diminish significantly, a considerable number of Jews were pushed out of higher education in Poland.

#### *Hitler and Nazism*

When trying to present events in world history, the authors of the textbooks often simply list facts and data. Lator finds it sufficient to declare that after World War I *many people* in Germany blamed the Jews, liberalism, and bolshevism for the defeat and the Versailles peace treaties. Worthwhile information on the program of the NSDAP, on the heterogeneous Nazi movement, on the techniques of capturing power, and on Hitler himself is available in Gyula Hosszú's textbook.

Naturally, no discussion and analysis of the Nazi dictatorship is possible without an assessment of the Bolshevik regime. The American textbook is laconic to the point of silence when it should be talking about the Soviet Gulag or the foreign policy of the Bolsheviks. It says nothing about the personality cult around Stalin, and that mars the credibility of the parts that rightly criticize the cult of Mussolini and Hitler. The student will not learn from this textbook why the German Communist Party sometimes cooperated with the Nazis against the Social Democrats. Both teachers and students are given a difficult job when asked to analyze the programs of the Nazis, the Communists, and the Social Democrats and to comment on which may have been more attractive. This question is impossible to answer correctly on the basis of this book because it fails to mention that Hitler won the masses, not with the party program of 1920, but with his social demagoguery, by persuading millions that he could lead Germany to resurrection. Neither does this textbook, like the others, say a word about his brilliant speeches.

The textbook by Benkes, Borsányi and Kende gives a good idea of the central role of Hitler's personality, succinctly summing up his ideology as well. Salamon merely mentions that Nazi Germany was a dictatorship and Hitler wanted to unite all Germans in one empire. He hardly touches upon the *Lebensraum* theory, which aimed at enslaving the Slavonic peoples. On the other hand, the survey of world history edited by István Diószegi *et alia* and used as a university textbook, mentions the *Lebensraum* theory and adds that enslavement led to physical and spiritual waste which was to be the lot of the peoples concerned

This textbook tries to justify the antisemitic propaganda of the Nazis by saying that Hitler and his propagandists *meant to diminish real social antagonisms with that*. This vulgar-Marxist claim does not explain why the Nazis still continued their antisemitic propaganda at the peak of their popularity. Again, Hosszú's book is the only one that provides reliable information on the *nightmarish antisemitism* of *Mein Kampf* (with original quotations from the text, the first time in the history of textbook publication in Hungary since 1945), on the boycott of Jewish businesses on April 1, 1933, on the antisemitic Civil Servants Act, on the Aryanizing ordinances, and on the Nuremberg laws. Setting an example for other textbook writers, Hosszú also provides comprehensive information on social Darwinism and on Neville Chamberlain's antisemitic view by quoting Iván Berend.

The American textbook quotes Hitler as saying *Nobody wants these criminals* and that is all it has to say about the whole issue of Jewish emigration. The western democracies could possibly have received more Jewish refugees from the Third Reich; Great Britain could have opened Palestine for Jewish immigrants, but even so, at least 147,000, and more than 360,000 people managed to leave Austria and Germany, respectively, before World War II.

### *The Holocaust in Europe*

Unfortunately, none of the textbooks tries to clearly define the individual characteristics of the Holocaust and discuss in what way it differs from other genocides in history. Yehuda Bauer's definition emphasizes the motivation and particularity of the mass murderers, stressing that never before in history have the leaders of a state intended to murder all the members of a given ethnic group. Mária Ormos, dating the Final Solution to the beginning of 1942, claims that the Nazis were expecting to exterminate 30 million European Jews. Although Eichmann provided Heydrich with tables containing rather inaccurate data, the number of the European Jews to be annihilated as discussed at Wannsee was "only" eleven million. There are great debates in the literature on the subject as to when exactly Hitler issued the order to physically exterminate the European Jews. Most of the specialists accept the summer and/or early autumn of 1941.

Not only the definition of the Holocaust is absent from the textbooks but also there is not one concise table or map with exact data that would help students grasp the full dimensions of the Jewish tragedy

### *Euthanasia Program*

When discussing the euthanasia program, the textbooks, regrettably, never mention that eugenic ideas were very popular all over the world. Hosszú's book makes it clear that in addition to being anti-Semites, the Nazis persecuted people who thought differently, people with sexual "deviancies," vagrants, Gypsies, and believed that a woman's place was in the delivery ward and in the kitchen.

I find the procedure of the American textbook professionally and didactically harmful when it causally remarks in connection with particular data, that *according to great many experts*, the number of victims is much higher. The number of victims of the euthanasia program is not known. We know that between 1939 and 1941 approximately 90 thousand individuals, mental patients declared incurable and unable to work, infants and children deformed at birth were killed. Given these facts, remarking lightly that *according to great many experts*, the number of victims was *at least quarter of a million* might lead students and teachers to have doubts concerning the seriousness of a discipline whose representatives throw around so many different numbers. In fact, some people may find the number of victims is too low. The naivete of the authors of the American book is shown by their remarks in connection with the euthanasia program.

### *The Death Camps*

Any student who wants to use Diószegi's textbook to learn the basic facts of the Holocaust is facing a tough job. The histories of several countries contain hardly anything about it. For example, in the section discussing the history of Germany, István Németh sums up the history of the Holocaust in four lines, saying that *after the winter of 1942-1943 extermination camps were set up, in which more than five million Jews were destroyed before the end of the war*. The problem with this is not only that he nearly doubles the number of people actually murdered in death camps. (Incidentally, when

talking about people, the use of the words *murdered, killed, executed* is certainly preferable to, and more precise than that of the impersonal *destroyed, exterminated*.)

It shows the general ignorance of the authors of the American book and its Hungarian editors that they claim that four million Jews were killed at Auschwitz. According to careful estimates, the number of the victims was approximately one million.

Péter Sipos may be too tough on the passivity of the European anti-fascist powers concerning the tragedy of the European Jews. One of his main arguments is that since the Jewish population of the Soviet Union had not been adequately informed about the antisemitic racist activities of the Third Reich, most Jews did not even try to flee from the German troops. The methodical and industrialized killing of Jews did not start until June 1941. It is unlikely that the Soviet press, even if allowed to do so, would have reported horrors greater than those in the Gulag. On the other hand, the horrible conditions that the Jews in the huge ghettos of Poland had to endure were widely known among both Jews and Gentiles in Europe.

According to a well-known anecdote, after Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union divided Poland between themselves, the Jews tried to escape across the border in both directions every night, and when they met, shocked, they asked those heading in the opposite direction, *Are you crazy, do you know what's awaiting you over there?*

I can only hope that the translator misunderstood something when the American textbook says: *The Soviet Union also found it difficult to admit to being guilty. For many years they were not ready to admit that in September 1941 more than 33 thousand Jews were killed in the Babi-Yar chasm in the Ukraine.* This would suggest, of course, that the Jews were killed by the Soviet authorities, when actually this mass murder was committed by the units of the *Einsatzgruppe*.

Average secondary school textbooks cannot be expected to give a complete, comprehensive picture of all the essential characteristics of the Holocaust. Not even the American textbook talks about the way the Nazis turned their prisoners into human wrecks, or about the Jewish *Kapos*, who, if they were assimilated, Neologue Jews, hated their Orthodox co-religionists, and if they were Orthodox, tortured the assimilated who could not even speak Yiddish.

The standard of this book is certainly not improved by the fact that although it appeared at the end of 1997, it does not refer to the book Daniel J. Goldhagen published in March, 1996. This is all the more curious since it discusses in detail the case of Reserve Police Battalion 101 — unfortunately, not Christopher Browning's book but an earlier essay. One is not aware from this textbook that Browning studied the papers of the post-war *trial* of the men of 101, that it is not *witnesses* but *accused* who had taken part in mass murders that are being described, and that they are not giving *interviews* but are *testifying*. What is more, their accomplices in the mass murders in Poland were not Poles but Lithuanian volunteers.

It is either a mistake by the translator or the editor of the American work did not know that the commander of 101, Captain Trapp did not punish his subordinates who refused

to participate in the mass murders. Unlike Goldhagen, who tried to show in his book that as "products" of a demonic antisemitic culture, every German took part in the mass murders voluntarily and with pleasure, Browning, in a masterful analysis, found various motivations for what the murderers had done. Among these was group solidarity, which is especially strong under conditions of war, paramilitary discipline, the effect of antisemitic propaganda, routine, and so on. The peculiarities of human nature include a tendency for aggression, as well as obedience to superiors and to authority. The American textbook describes the experiments of Millgram and Zimbardo without associating them with the actual case of 101. The reason is chiefly that the editors of the American book wrote the book relying basically on the works of Hannah Arendt. Arendt's notion of the Holocaust, which is closely related to her specific theory of masses and power, has as its starting point the fact that humans are easy to manipulate, willingly obeying orders from above, and indeed, if necessary, participate without hesitation in the destruction of themselves and their own community. A number of the better-known errors of Arendt — such as that the members of the Jewish Councils, organized by the Nazis, had been respected and acknowledged leaders of their communities, or that these Councils undertook to participate in the extermination of Jews happily, readily, and full of ambition — were already convincingly refuted by the literature on the subject decades ago. This is precisely why it is a pity her book on Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem was chosen as the basis of this American textbook .

### *The Sztójay government*

According to Jenő Gergely, the occupying Germans left more formal characteristics of independent statehood intact in Hungary after March 19, 1944 than anywhere else in occupied Europe. However, there was no *Reichskommissar* in Denmark either, although it was a hostile country. In appreciation of the fact that the Danes had surrendered without a gunshot, the Germans allowed the parliament to function, and the government as well as the monarch stayed in place. The puppet government of Marshall Petain also had as many attributes of formal independence as the government of Sztójay.

Salamon claims that by the time Horthy had the deportations stopped, thereby saving temporarily the lives of the Jews of Budapest, over half a million Jews had been deported from Hungary between May 15 and July 6, 1944. We know, however, from the reports of Gendarme Lieutenant-Colonel László Ferenczy and German ambassador Edmund Veesenmayer that "only" 437,000 people were deported.

Nobody has described the Hungarian people as fascists since György Gadó, a liberal member of parliament, claimed in May 1990 that the majority of Hungarian society were overjoyed in 1944 and glad that the Jews were deported in 1944. The American textbook does exactly that, suggesting by a carefully selected piece of reminiscence that nobody in Hungary took pity on the Jews and nobody tried to help them. Very probably, the last memory most Jews had of Hungary was the sight of sneering and jeering mobs, but to generalize so rudely, and not cite one single counterexample is a mistake. I hope no antisemitic journalists will read this page because it would give them material enough for weeks.

Salamon attributes Horthy's decision to stop the deportations simply to the increasing international protests. Only slightly more precisely, Lator mentions the landing in Normandy as well as the international protests. The legend that Horthy needed military units loyal to him personally in order to be able to stop the deportation of the Budapest Jews is only mentioned by Jenő Gergely. It is difficult to see if, as Gergely writes, Horthy and the government had no control over the situation, how they were able to deploy the army and why they did that for the sake of the Jews. What really happened was that on one word from Horthy the gendarme units, who were fanatically loyal to him, moved from Budapest, and in fact the deployment of the Esztergom armoured units of Colonel Koszorús was a demonstration of power meant for the Germans.

It is again Hosszú who, apart from Jenő Gergely, tries to justify both Horthy's decision to stop the deportations and the operation of Sztójay's government using original documents. Hosszú mentions the increasing protests at home and abroad, the Auschwitz protocols, the Soviet offensive and the landing of the western allies in Normandy. Gergely even says that Budapest's Jews were meant to be used as some kind of moral reserve after the war was over. This may be true, but it is highly unlikely, as he says, that while Horthy would not dare to deport the Jews in the capital, who were closer to power, with more international connections, he was ready to deport the poor Jews in the country. The most eager perpetrators believed in the victory of the Germans and Horthy did not care about the Jews, with the possible exception of the Chorins, the Vidas and other rich Jews, who by that time had sold their factories to the Germans and departed for Portugal.

#### *The Arrow-Cross Regime*

Salamon holds that nearly half of the 200 thousand Jews in the capital were murdered by the Arrow-Cross. Lator gives a similar number. Zsuzsa L. Nagy exaggerates when claiming that the program of the Arrow-Cross government included among others the annihilation of the Jews. Szálasi was not trying to please the Germans when he issued orders to organize the ghettos in Budapest. If L. Nagy were right, and the Arrow-Cross had been determined to completely exterminate the Jews, then it is difficult to understand why houses with the star of David, the international ghetto as well as the great ghetto were, at certain points of time, defended by policemen and soldiers (often against bandits wearing Arrow-Cross armbands), and why the capital went on feeding more than 70 thousand prisoners in the great ghetto. As we have mentioned, Szálasi wanted to free Hungary from the Jews, but it cannot be proved that he intended to do that through murdering them by the thousands. When he saw that neutral countries would recognize his regime if he stopped deporting the Jews of Budapest, he did so after a little hesitation. This is not because he did not trust in the final victory of the Germans, but probably also from conservative and religious/moral considerations as well.

The textbooks, of course, mention people who saved Jews, picking out Raoul Wallenberg first of all. The American textbook writers managed to set a peculiar record in connection with the heroic Swedish diplomat. There is not one correct statement in connection with him. Wallenberg did not come to Budapest at the personal request of F. D. Roosevelt, and he did not pay one penny for Swedish safe houses. It should have been mentioned, on the other hand, that Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz had more houses and at an earlier date. Wallenberg did not save 70 thousand people and there was no plan to blow

up the ghetto. 50 thousand safe conducts issued did not mean 50 thousand people saved, since the Arrow-Cross sometimes shot the owners of the most authentic Swedish, Spanish, and Vatican safe conducts and threw them into the Danube without batting an eyelid. It is regrettable that the textbooks do not mention the Zionist resistance. Their members forged safe conducts by the thousand, tried to save hundreds of children, risked their lives taking food into the ghetto, and even managed to snatch people from the death marches.

### *Epilogue*

Half a decade ago I wrote that while it might not be possible to write good textbooks, that are satisfactory in all respects, at least the effort should be made. Now, I repeat with heartfelt delight, I must admit I was wrong. Gyula Hosszú's work stands out among the Hungarian and foreign secondary school textbooks for its exemplary attitude and rich material. I really feel sorry for those students who are not using this book. I would also be delighted if a bold and respected editor could somehow persuade Mária Ormos, Zsuzsa L. Nagy, Ignác Romsics, and Loránt Tilkovszky to write a joint university textbook. Thus, in-depth analyses of political history could be combined with descriptions of the social, cultural and national story.

General secondary programme preparing for secondary school final examination for vocational training school graduates (3CV). 4CV. Post-secondary vocational programmes where the entry requirement is a secondary school-leaving certificate. 5B. College education generally lasts for 4 years, while university education lasts for 4 to 6 years depending on the course undertaken. Vocational curriculum usually last 2 years: they are opened to secondary vocational school's graduates, and eventually vocational school students (after 5 years of work in the desired field or after a two-year program leading to a "secondary school leaving certificate").[9] University PhD courses usually take 3 years to complete. Secondary school and university each lasted 3 or 4 years. Many schools ran six days a week and operated with morning shifts and afternoon shifts. Vocational schools were often attached to factories. Schools on collectives typically had grades one through eight or one through ten. Nursery schools and kindergartens served both as schools for the very young and day care centers. Many were operated factories or collective farms. People generally didn't have trouble finding kindergarten places for their kids. They received good health care and were able to take long vacations on the Black Sea. Students were often recruited for the month-long potato harvest in the fall. Many students tried to weasel out of it by inventing medical excuses. The book provoked a firestorm in his native country and almost a decade later Grabowski - a history professor at the University of Ottawa - remains embroiled in legal challenges. In 2018 he sued the Polish League Against Defamation for libel, after it accused him of exaggerating the number of Jews that were killed by Poles during the Nazi occupation. Poland's right-wing Law and Justice Party has long leveraged what critics have called "the politics of memory" in its attempt to attract a nationalist base. After 1945, much of eastern Europe was subsumed by the Soviet Union, which discouraged focus on the Nazi genocide as uniquely Jewish tragedy. It was only when the Berlin Wall fell that historians were able to gauge the true scale of the atrocities committed in Eastern Europe.