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Prior to the end of the war, while still in exile in London, Jaromír Smutný, *chef de cabinet* of President Dr. Eduard Beneš, already dwelt on the issue of "collaboration." In 1943, he wrote: "The problem of Hácha is as specific as are similar problems of Pétain, Laval, Darlan and other politicians." At the same time, he advised that the judgment should be left to a later date, when these issues could be examined in a broader context and "without passion."¹

Indeed, while the case of Emil Hácha, the Protectorate state president, is described in the historiography as "clear-cut collaboration," the stance of General Alois Eliáš, the premier of the Czech government, remains one of the most intriguing riddles in the history of World War II.² His unique policy of retardation and "double game," as well as his tragic fate are without parallel during the war. Eliáš was the only prime minister to be tried by the Nazis for high treason and executed.

The American scholar Stanley Hoffmann, in his perceptive analysis "Self Ensnared, Collaboration with Nazi Germany,"³ discussing the stance of the wartime Vichy government, has come to some overriding conclusions. He distinguishes between two types of collaboration: (1) "State collaboration," i.e., safeguarding interests in interstate relationships between the defeated state and the victor; and (2) collaborationism with the Nazis, in an openly willful cooperation and imitation of the German regime [which in effect meant voluntary activity], either in a drive for career

¹ This is a revised and expanded version of a paper delivered at an international conference in Ostrava in 1994; see "Motivy a záměr protektorátní vlády v řešení židovské otázky," in Ludmila Nesládková, ed., *Nisko 1939/1940; The Case Nisko in the History of the Final Solution of the Jewish Problem*, Proceedings, International Academic Conference (Nisko 1939/1940) (Ostrava: Facultas Philosophica Universitatis Ostraviensis, 1995), pp. 160-173.

Smutný's text prepared in mid-1943 for the London *Observer* is printed in Milada Červínková, Libuše Otáhalová, eds., *Dokumenty z historie čsl. politiky 1939-1943, Acta occupationis Bohemiae et Moraviae*, (DHČP) (Prague: Academia, 1966), I, doc. 339, p. 412.

² Tomáš Pasák, *Generál Alois Eliáš a odboj*, Slovo k historii II, 27 (Prague: Melantrich, 1995); Robert Kvaček, Dušan Tomášek, *Generál Alois Eliáš, Jeden český osud* (Prague: Epoque, 1996); Dušan Tomášek, Robert Kvaček, *Causa Emil Hácha* (Prague: Themis, 1995); for a milder judgement, see Tomáš Pasák, *Judr. Emil Hácha 1938 – 1945* (Prague: Horizont, 1997).

³ See Stanley Hoffmann, *Decline or Renewal? France since the 1930s* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), pp.26-44.

advancement or from an ideological basis. Most of these persons were motivated by antisemitism, xenophobia, or hatred of Communism.⁴

Hoffmann's conclusions can be differentially applied to the conditions in the Protectorate and to the case of Czech quislings. In general, we could assert that neither the puppet governments in the Nazi-occupied countries nor those of the satellite states put the rescue of Jews on their agenda. This axiom is valid also with regard to the Protectorate government.

From the available research on the role of collaborationist governments we learn that their members were, for the most part, recruited from the ranks of fascist organizations and extreme rightist parties. Moreover, the satellite states' treatment of the Jews served as proof of their loyalty vis-à-vis the Third Reich. Nevertheless, we may assert that their posture concerning "the Final Solution of the Jewish Question" was to a certain measure by (1) the degree of dependence on the Reich; and, in the course of time (2) the developments on the front.

Of note, from this point of view, is the case of the clero-fascist government in Slovakia, which, aside from initiating the deportation of its Jews in early 1942, paid the Germans for each "evacuee" a sum of 500 RM, as a "settlement allowance." However, in 1943, in the wake of the German debacle at Stalingrad and following the renewed intervention of the Holy See against the expulsion of Jews (the change in the local clergy's stance under the impact of the illegal Bratislava "Working Group"), the Slovaks decided to bring the deportation campaign to a halt.⁵

Another illustrative case is that of the Vichy government of Marshal Petain, known for its ideological leanings toward Nazism and its own brand of a racial policy of "state antisemitism." This government issued on its own initiative the strident *Les statuts des Juifs* (October 3, 1940; and June 2, 1941).⁶ In due course the French police demonstrated great readiness in collaborating with the Germans in the deportation of Jews. However, the shock caused by the round-ups of Jews in the summer of 1942 had a boomerang effect, and Jewish underground movements engaged thereafter in

⁴ Ibid., pp. 30-31

⁵ Livia Rothkirchen, "The Slovak Enigma; A Reassessment of the Halt to the Deportations," *East Central Europe*, Vol.10, 1- 2 (1983), pp. 3, 13; for a somewhat different assessment of this issue, see Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, "The Calm Years" in Akiva Nir, ed., *Aspects of the Holocaust of Slovakian Jewry* (Hebrew) (Givat Chaviva, 1984), pp. 33-47.

⁶ Denis Peschanski, "The Statutes on Jews, October 3, 1940 and June 2, 1941," in *Yad Vashem Studies*, 12 (XXII) (1992), pp. 65-88; Renée Poznanski, "The Jews of France and the Statutes on Jews," *ibid.*, pp. 115-146.

rescue operations with the willing assistance of ordinary Frenchmen. Both the Catholic and the Protestant churches began to show more readiness in providing means and baptismal certificates for their purposes.⁷ Thus, owing to the pressure of the resistance and domestic popular opposition, the French authorities were forced to make concessions. As a result three-quarters of the French Jews were saved. Most of those who perished were either foreigners or naturalized Jews.⁸

Similarly to Vichy, the Czech Protectorate government did not arise in a vacuum. Following the Austrian *Anschluss* there were some disturbing signs of aggressive anti-Jewish notions and frequent slanders in the press; some Czech newspapers even began printing articles from Streicher's *Der Stürmer*.⁹ Curiously enough, this new tendency is also evident in the May 5, 1938, letter of the Czechoslovak consul general in New York to the Foreign Ministry in Prague, in which he transmitted a protest against the antisemitic article published in the magazine *Česká výzva* on April 4, 1938.¹⁰ The complaint was written by Dr. Stephen S. Wise, the well-known Jewish leader and erstwhile friend and supporter of Thomas G. Masaryk, and thus required a speedy reply. After the issue was duly discussed by the Czech authorities, the minister of the Interior advised the head of the Praesidium of the District Administration to adopt the consulate general's recommendation: "to act possibly in such a way that the anti-Jewish utterances would not surpass the measure desirable to Czech interests, especially in the United States."¹¹

As far as the initial economic measures against Jews are concerned, these date back to the post-Munich Second Republic, which had been plagued by deep political crisis and chaos. Even though at this stage the rightist Beran government, known for its alacrity in "accommodating" the Third Reich, kept demonstrating a certain restraint, anti-Jewish excesses occurred in several localities. The question of Jewish property

⁷ Pierre Laborie, "The Jewish Statutes in Vichy France and Public Opinion," *ibid.*, pp. 89-114.

⁸ Michael Marrus, "Coming to Terms with Vichy," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1995), pp.34-35; Serge Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz: Le role de Vichy dans la solution finale de la question juive en France, 1943-1944* (Paris: Fayard, 1985).

⁹ Even some noted liberal journalists, among them Ferdinand Peroutka, the editor of *Přítomnost*, wrote several articles in an antisemitic vein, vexing the Jewish public. A kaleidoscope of the anti-Jewish excesses may be found in the "Bulletin of the Csl. League Against Antisemitism" - *Věstník čsl. Ligy proti antisemitismu*, published from 1937. The national chairman of this organization was Pastor Bohumil Vančura of the Church of Bohemian Brethren.

¹⁰ The Minister of Interior's instruction of July 25, 1938 to the Presidium of the Provincial Administration, in the matter of the American Jewish Congress' complaint, May 5, 1938: Státní ústřední archiv Praze (Central State Archives), *SÚA*, MV,-207-1938-5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

came more and more to the forefront. It was clear that Jewish assets were to be utilized for the stabilization of the economy as compensation for the losses suffered in the ceded territories of the Sudetenland. The prevailing atmosphere is reflected in the report the British chargé d'affaires, J.M. Troutbeck, dispatched from Prague to his government:

...There is a diversity of views among unprejudiced persons as to how far anti-Jewish measures are being forced upon Czechs from Germany and how far the Czechs are merely alleging German pressure as an excuse for taking action which they themselves desire... there are Czechs of the younger generation particularly in the liberal professions, who beat the antisemitic drum — they are indeed particularly active in the legal profession, but in general antisemitism is foreign to the Czech temperament.¹²

Still, antisemitic agitation became the order of the day, and the by-now socially segregated Jewish population found itself engulfed in "sorrow and uncertainty."¹³ Yet the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia by the Wehrmacht on March 15, 1939, came as a surprise to all and signaled the approaching peril and calamity.

The aims of Nazi policy in the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" (proclaimed by Hitler himself on the morrow of the occupation) were developed against the background of the centuries-long Czech-German conflict and within the framework of Hitler's "*Drang nach Osten*." In fact, from 1939 onward, several schemes conceived by the leaders of the Third Reich were aimed at the final liquidation of the idea of Czech sovereignty. The Nazis firmly believed that, after the victorious war, the Czech lands were to become, again, "the heart-piece of the Great Germanic Reich."¹⁴

Initially, the terror unleashed in the Protectorate was not all-pervasive, unlike that in Poland. The exigencies of the war made "the solution of the Czech question" a long-range target and, as such, was subordinated to the economic needs of the total exploitation of local resources, heavy industry, and the working capacity of the population. The Czech lands were to be the granary of the Reich; the laborers

¹² J. M. Troutbeck, First Secretary of the British Legation in Prague to Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, February 9, 1939, see Public Record Office, PRO No.63, C1868/568.

¹³ Editorial in *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze*, December, 20, 1938.

¹⁴ Speech by Reinhard Heydrich on October 2, 1941, in Karel Fremund and Václav Král, eds., *Lesson from History. Documents Concerning Nazi Policies, Germanisation and Extermination in Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Orbis, 1962), doc. 19, p.118.

providing arms, tools, and services for the war effort were to be given preferential treatment.¹⁵

Eliáš entered office as prime minister of the Protectorate government on April 27, 1939, and held it throughout the quasi-mild, so-called "pacification" period of *Reichsprotektor* Konstantin von Neurath. These were the two most critical years as far as both anti-Jewish legislation and emigration overseas (and the first experiment in deportation) are concerned. The Germans, obviously, most eager to consolidate the political situation and to carry out the militarization of the Czech economy and industry, considered General Eliáš to be the right choice to reconcile the unruly strata of the Czech population.¹⁶

In what way did the Protectorate government differ from quislings in other states, and what are the particular characteristics in the Czech case? It is doubtless that the most striking phenomenon of the Protectorate government was the dominant figure of Premier General Alois Eliáš. A former World War I legionnaire and a later associate of Dr. Beneš, he acted between 1926 and 1931 as delegate to the League of Nations. In the post-Munich government of Rudolf Beran he served as Minister of Transport. After the German seizure of the Czech lands, Eliáš became a leading member of "The Defence of the Nation" (*Obrana národa- ON*), the secret military organization. His foremost aim to all intents and purposes was the renewal of sovereignty. Thus, from the very beginning he closely cooperated with the Czechoslovak National Committee formed abroad and later with the government-in-exile in London.¹⁷

One of the important documents that reflects General Eliáš's responsibility and unrelenting commitment to his homeland is dated October 11, 1939; it is addressed to his deputy, Dr. Jiří Havelka, who also acted as the state president's secretary. Expressing disagreement over the content and tone of a letter addressed to Hitler, Eliáš urged him to make some corrections:

... the more I read it, the more grievous is my impression. It seems to me that this letter could hardly stand, either currently or eventually later, before [the

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 119-120.

¹⁶ Miroslav Kárný, "Die Logik von München: Das Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren," in Dietrich Eichholtz and Kurt Pätzold, eds., *Der Weg in den Krieg* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989), pp. 305-306.

¹⁷ Jaroslava Eliášová - Tomáš Pasák, "Poznámky k Benešovým kontaktům s Eliášem ve druhé světové válce" in *Historie a vojenství*, No.1 (1967), pp. 108-140; Tomáš Pasák, "Činnost protektorátní úřadny v roce 1939" in *Československý historický časopis* XVII, No.4 (1969), pp.553-representace na podzim roku 1939" in *Československý historický časopis* XVII, No.4 (1969), pp.553-572.

judgement] of history and would thus serve to the condemnation of the old man... Please, do weaken whatever is possible; cut from the letter everything that refers to March 15 directly or indirectly. I think thereby we shall at least be able to express something...¹⁸

Needless to say, Eliáš's government was not monolithic; while some of its members, active figures in the previous regime, were ready to adapt to the new conditions, others secretly supported the prime minister. Two of the ministers, Ladislav Feierabend and Jaromír Nečas, made a successful escape in January 1940 (with Eliáš's knowledge), to join the Czechoslovak resistance abroad and later as members of the government-in-exile.¹⁹

While we do not have solid information about Eliáš's personal attitude toward the Jewish community, we may surmise that as an enlightened Czech patriot and former member of the "Truth Prevails" Freemason Lodge, he had no prejudice. We may also assume that he was aware of the murderous aims of Nazi policy toward Jews early on.²⁰ It was František Chvalkovský, the Czechoslovak foreign minister, to whom, during his visit to Berlin on January 21, 1939, Hitler, in passing, revealed: "... Here in Germany we are destroying the Jews."²¹

In the pursuit of his main goal, as of mid-1939, Premier Eliáš took part in the organized escape of soldiers and airmen via Budapest. This campaign, indeed, greatly contributed to the formation of the first Czechoslovak army units in France and England. By means of telegraph and courier service, he kept in contact with the representatives of the National Committee in Paris and, mainly, the head of Intelligence, General František Moravec. Later, he maintained communication also with Dr. Beneš himself. It is interesting that Eliáš's link to Dr. Beneš during the latter's stay in America was the noted historian and diplomat George F. Kennan.²² Kennan had arrived in Prague in August 1938, as secretary to the U.S. Legation, and thus became an eyewitness and reporter of the drama in post-Munich Czechoslovakia. His

¹⁸ *DHČP*, II, doc. 364, Prague, 11. 10. 1939, p. 454.

¹⁹ Ladislav Karel Feierabend, *Politické vzpomínky 1-3* (Brno: Atlantis, 1994 – 1996).

²⁰ Already in early November 1938 the word spread in higher echelons that the Germans demand physical attacks against Jews. A report sent from Prague by J.M. Troutbeck, to Lord Halifax (November 15, 1938), refers to a "conversation between Count Kinsky and Robert J. Stopford." See PRO No. 397, C14 188/2475/ (Enclosure).

²¹ "Die Juden würden bei uns vernichtet," Minutes of the conversation of January 21, 1939, see *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945*, Serie D (1937-1941), vol.IV (Baden-Baden: Imprimerie nationale, 1951), doc.158, pp.170-171.

²² Kvaček-Tomášek, *Generál Alois Eliáš*, p.66.

skillful briefings, "with their three-dimensional quality" (flair, substance, and atmosphere), comprise a unique contribution to the historiography of the period.²³

One of the marked characteristics of German rule in the Bohemian lands was the harsh treatment and humiliation meted out to the Czech government by the German security services. The latter were constantly watching and scrutinizing the premier and other government members' moves. From the first days of the occupation, while still under military administration, the government needed special approval for each meeting of its plenum. Dr. Friedrich Bachmann, representing Konrad Henlein, the head of the civil administration, had to be present at all government meetings.²⁴ Later on, as we know, the Reich Protector himself interfered in government meetings, issuing instructions phrased as orders.

Even though President Hácha remained in his post, all vestiges of Czech sovereignty were abolished after March 15, 1939. Two days later Beran's government held its first session, and a set of anti-Jewish measures were accepted that excluded Jews from public life.²⁵ Already at this stage the Committee of National Solidarity (*Národní souručenství*), a quasi-parliamentary body, established at the president's initiative, became especially active in appointing trustees and commissars to non-Aryan factories and concerns.²⁶

On April 27, 1939, Hácha reorganized the cabinet, appointing General Eliáš as prime minister. One of the first targets of the new premier was to pursue "intensely" the preparation of an outline defining the legal status of Jews in public life. We should assert that Eliáš's intention in dealing with the question of anti-Jewish legislation was first and foremost utilitarian, as it aimed to prevent the transfer of Jewish property into German hands and thus safeguard Czech interests for the benefit of the national

²³ George F. Kennan, *From Prague After Munich. Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1968). For an assessment of the author's invaluable contribution, see "Epilogue by Frederick G. Heymann," pp. 241-253.

²⁴ Břetislav Tvarůžek, "Okupace Čech a Moravy a vojenská správa (15. březen až 15. duben 1939)"; in *Historie a vojenství*, Časopis historického ústavu československé armády, XLI, No. 3 (1992), pp. 52-53.

²⁵ Protokoll der Regierungssitzung vom 17.3.1939, Beschlüsse IV bis VIII (Beschränkung der Praxis der nichtarischen Ärzte, und Advokaten, Beseitigung der Nichtarier aus den Funktionen der einigen wirtschaftlichen Organisationen und aus allen leitenden Stellen in industriellen Unternehmen und Organisationen, die Bezeichnung rein arischer Geschäfte), *SÚA*, sign. PMR, Box 4148; see Miroslav Kárný, "Vorgeschichte des Regierungsverordnung über die Rechtsstellung der Juden im öffentlichen Leben," *Judaica Bohemiae*, XXX-XXXI (1996), p.109.

²⁶ Miroslav Kárný, "Die Judenfrage in der Nazistischen Okkupationspolitik," *Historica* XXI (1982), p.147.

economy.²⁷ In effect, by the exclusion of Jews from various sectors of economic and public life Eliáš meant to solve the problem of massive unemployment that was plaguing the country as a result of the disintegration of former Czechoslovakia. The large numbers of Czech officials and army personnel who had lost their positions after the cession of territories to Germany and to Hungary needed new jobs and a source of livelihood.

As a matter of fact, the occupation authorities did not demand the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws, already effective at that time in the Reich, both in Germany and in Austria; this decision was left to the Czech government. It appears, however, that Neurath believed that this could be achieved as a result of "the given dynamics,"²⁸ i.e., the pressure of the various fascist groups that clamored for the introduction of the racial Nuremberg Laws.

We may presume that Premier Eliáš discussed this issue also with leading Czech representatives abroad. From the notes of Jaromír Smutný we learn that, very early on, in his messages dispatched to the Home Resistance, Dr. Beneš kept referring to the international political situation, warning them not to fraternize with Nazis since "pro-German activities at home are most harmful."²⁹

In his effort to find a *modus vivendi* on the exclusion of Jews from the economy, Eliáš kept postponing the issue until, at last, on May 11, 1939, the final draft was submitted for the review of the Reich Protector. However, notwithstanding the pressure of the extreme fascist organization "Vlajka" (the Flag) and some members of the National Solidarity, the draft law was based on principles of religion.³⁰ Consequently, on May 22, a meeting was called at the Reich protector's office, with participants from all interested sectors. The discussion centered mainly on clause 2 as to "who should be considered a Jew," and clause 8, "the exemption from the law upon the proposal of the State President." Both clauses were severely criticized for their "mild nature." In the end no decision was taken. The government's draft

²⁷ *DHČP*, II, doc. 365, p. 464.

²⁸ Originally it was Hitler who suggested to von Neurath "to leave the decision to the Czechs." See Burgsdorff "Judengesetze," minutes of May 2, 1939 in Miroslav Kárný, Jaroslava Milotová, Dagmar Moravcová, eds., *Anatomie okupační politiky hitlerovského Německa v "Protektorátu Čechy a Morava."* Sborník k problematice dějin imperialismu, Vol. 21 (Prague: ČSAV, 1987), doc. 77, pp. 203-205.

²⁹ Cf. Beneš's message from London to Prague, May 11, 1940, Eliášová-Pasák, "Poznámky," p.123.

³⁰ Cf. Kárný, Milotová, Moravcová, eds., *Anatomie*, doc. 79-84, pp. 205-219.

proposal was circulated among various public officials and also sent for comments to some authorities in Berlin.

On June 21, 1939, the Reich Protector took the Czech government by surprise and issued his own comprehensive decree on Jewish property (*Verordnungen des Reichsprotectors über das jüdische Vermögen*), effective retroactively to March 15, and defining Jews according to the criteria of the Nuremberg Laws.³¹ Practically, this meant the addition of some 5 to 6 percent of people (to the total 105,000 Protectorate Jews) who would have been exempted from the law according to the government proposal.³² The Reich Protector reserved to himself full authority pertaining to the enforcement of the drastic economic measures. Neurath's decree introduced a wide definition of the term "Jewish firm" so as to include a broad scale of potential cases, thus enabling owners of German factories and concerns to "Aryanize" firms where Jews held even negligible shares.³³ However, this step also ensured that the process of despoiling the Jews would hurt the Czechs, too, thus reaching far beyond the ostensible purpose.

It became clear that the property of the Jewish population in Bohemia and Moravia [roughly estimated at 20 billion Crowns] was intended to strengthen German ethnicity in the Czech lands. Most instructive is the secret directive issued on the very day of the entrance of the Wehrmacht to Prague: "*Jüdisches Vermögen wird Volksgut*" ("the Jewish assets become the people's property").³⁴ In effect, the "Jewish question" had become directly connected to the "Czech question," forming a cornerstone in the Germanization process of the erstwhile Bohemian lands. Neurath's decision also made it abundantly clear who "are the masters of the house," and the Czech establishment came to realize the gross offense and infringement on the legal basis of the country's autonomy. On July 3, 1939, the U.S. consul in Prague briefed the State Department that the legislative authority of the Protectorate "must be considered as already abandoned in everything but name."³⁵

³¹ *Verordnungsblatt des Reichsprotectors*, No. 6, May 7, 1939.

³² Kárný, "Vorgeschichte," pp. 110--111.

³³ *DHČP*, II, January 3, 1940, doc. 379 (enclosure), p. 500.

³⁴ "Sinn und Zweck der Gründung der Treuhandstelle im Rahmen der Erfassung des jüdischen Vermögens, der 15. März 1939." Yad Vashem Archives 07/1- 1, 151/156; *DHČP*, II, doc. 365, pp. 464-465.

³⁵ See "Dispatch of July 3, 1939, from Consul-General Linnell to the Department of State on General Conditions in Bohemia and Moravia," in Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, pp.188-189.

With the promulgation of the law on Jewish property, the Reich Protector de jure retained full authority and jurisdiction over the Jewish community. Adolf Eichmann's arrival in Prague as delegate of the Jewish Section of the Berlin Reichsicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) was well synchronized. He became instrumental in establishing, according to the Vienna pattern, the "Central Office for Jewish Emigration" (Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung), which was empowered to handle all Jewish affairs as well as launch the emigration program.³⁶ Even though a whole set of laws and anti-Jewish measures issued between 1939 and 1940 carry the imprimatur of the Protectorate government, the Czech authorities ceased to be a responsible factor in decisions regarding the fate of the Jews.

In the meantime, Eichmann launched his initial "resettlement" campaign: all provincial Jews were to be concentrated in Prague prior to their "shipment" abroad. His method of forced emigration caused great panic. Following are passages from two insightful reports by police chiefs who attended the meetings held by the Jewish community functionaries. The first report, compiled by Police Commissary Dr. Miloš Šebor (and addressed to the Ministry of Interior), records the meeting at the Prague Jewish Townhall on July 30, 1939, at which the crucial issue of forced emigration was discussed. The gathering was attended by representatives of the Prague community, all provincial Jewish communities, and the leading members of the Zionist organizations, headed by Dr. Franz Kahn, who also chaired the session. The report reveals, on the one hand, the desperate mood of the Jewish leadership and its unprecedented situation; on the other hand, we learn of the ignominious stance of Dr. Šebor, the "intervening officer," who represented the Czech government.

... the first participant asking to comment was Leo Singer, representing as chairman the community of Jindřichův Hradec... he complained that these meetings are arranged with long delays even though the emigration of Jews has to take place in an accelerated way... Before every meeting we have to come to terms with the head of the district office and there [the appeal] lies for a fortnight. Then it is sent to the *Oberlandrat* and the *Oberlandrat* has it lie about...[Dr. Šebor, the intervening officer]: After this utterance I called right away upon the chairman to reprimand the speaker for the way he spoke out, asking to stop [him] at once. Before even Singer made his pronouncement, according to my routine, I took his personal data. The chairman [Dr. Kahn] thereupon closed the session with a short announcement made in Czech... in his closing words he stressed that every Jew has to believe in the eternal

³⁶ Wochenbericht der Jüdischen Kultusgemeinde in Prag, July 23-29, 7. 1939.

existence of the nation. The participants dispersed in a composed way. I haven't noticed the presence of the representative of the German Reich authorities.³⁷

The second "very urgent" report, sent by the Police Directorate of České Budějovice to the presidium of the Ministry of Interior in Prague, dated August 7, 1939, differs both in content and tone from the account quoted above. Police Commissary Nečásek, describing the session at the Jewish community of České Budějovice, which was attended by seventeen representatives, summed up the arguments raised on the planned evacuation:

It was evident that the Jews are fully crushed by this decision and for the time being seem to be totally helpless. During the debate, one of the posed questions pointed out that there will not be anybody to take care of the old and sick Jews [left behind]. For it is doubtful whether their own community could take care of them... I asked Rabbi Dr. Ferda to keep me informed about the continuing developments, in case he will have a chance to do so.³⁸

Following the intervention of the Czech district authorities and mainly that of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Trade, arguing that this move would endanger the economy, the campaign of concentration of provincial Jews was eventually suspended—for the time being.³⁹ However, soon after the outbreak of war and the occupation of Poland, a new campaign, construed by *Reichsführer S.S.* Himmler for the strengthening of Germandom, called for the resettlement of the Jews of the Katowice region, Moravská Ostrava, and Vienna in the Generalgouvernement. The task of this "reserve," in Himmler's words, was to be "a rubbish bin" meant to absorb around one million Jews.⁴⁰

Reich Protector von Neurath gave his ready consent for the deportation of the Jews of the Protectorate. Known in the historiography as the "Nisko Plan," this campaign

³⁷ See the report of Police Commissary Šebor, July 30.1939, *SÚA*, sign. PMR, 225-1323-1-8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, the report of Police Commissary Nečásek; full text of this report was printed (as doc. 3, pp. 174-175) in a selection of pertinent documents published by Otto D. Kulka, "Towards an Understanding of the SD's Jewish Policy in the First Occupied Countries" (Hebrew) in *Yalkut Moreshet*, No.18 (November 1974), pp. 163-184.

³⁹ Kárný, "Judenfrage," p. 147.
⁴⁰ Heinrich Himmler, *Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen*, eds., Bradley F. Smith, Agnes F. Peterson (Frankfurt a. M., Wien: Propyläen Verlag, 1974), pp.128-129.

actually became the first Nazi deportation experiment prior to the deportations to the so-called "Lublinland."⁴¹

The outbreak of war generated a new optimistic atmosphere among the Czechs, and the Security Services began promptly scrutinizing the activities of the various resistance groups; during operation "Albrecht I" several hundred former army officers were remanded. In October 1939, the first group of members of the clandestine ON and PÚ (Politické ústředí-- Political Center), who engaged in intelligence gathering, were arrested. Among them was Dr. Zdeněk Schmoranz, head of the Czech Press Department in the Prime Minister's Office.⁴² Another wave of arrests included a whole range of journalists connected with the illegal *Into Battle (V boj)*, the most popular underground paper in the Protectorate.

Eliáš's situation became even more precarious after the students' demonstrations on November 17. On December 2, 1939, the first alarm was sounded from Nazi headquarters with regard to the premier's involvement. State Secretary Karl H. Frank, in his speech at the Old Town Square, announced that Germany would not tolerate any opposition and would employ the most severe measures: "The Czech government and the Czech leaders should abandon all ambiguity and double-talk."

Eliáš apparently retreated to a sanatorium for a few days.⁴³ His anguish is reflected in two contradictory moves he made on December 8, 1939. While meeting the German Press Bureau, Eliáš declared full loyalty to the Reich, welcoming the harmonious symbiosis of the Czech and German nations. He also stressed that "the only representative of the Czech people was the Protectorate government." Moreover, Eliáš condemned the activities of the National Committee abroad, terming his relations with Dr. Beneš as "clearly negative."⁴⁴ On that very day, however, after consultations with Ministers Feierabend and Klumpar, he dispatched a message to President Beneš in London, assuring him of his government's loyalty and asking for his a priori consent "in such opportunistic political moves," which would help in

⁴¹ See *Nisko 1939/1940*; see also Mečislav Borák, *Transport do tmy; První deportace evropských Židů* (Ostrava, 1994).

⁴² See indictment of Alois Eliáš, Nuremberg Document, NG-081; indictment of Zdeněk Schmoranz, NG-699.41.

⁴³ For the autumn arrests see Detlef Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter deutschem Protektorat*, I-II (München und Wien: R. Oldenbourg, 1969), I, p. 98.

⁴⁴ *DHČP*, I, doc. 376, December 8, 1939, pp.493-494.

evading national or economic disaster."⁴⁵ It seems that for this and for similar tactics and announcements the head of the Prague Gestapo, Geschke, described him as: "the Janus-faced Premier."⁴⁶

An illuminating instance of how powerless, indeed, the Czech government had become as of the autumn of 1939 is the case of the so-called "privileged" Jews and their exemption from the anti-Jewish legislation. This category included individuals known for outstanding services rendered to the state in the fields of science, literature, the arts, and sport, or men with outstanding military careers. In the Protectorate this became a case *sui generis*, arousing prompt opposition. The possibility that State President Hácha could "out of mercy" declare an individual a non-Jew was questioned outright. Most enlightening are the comments of Chief of the Security Police Stahlecker on June 1, 1939, arguing why this would be simply "unacceptable."

In effect, this rule of exception, would, doubtlessly, include the [category of] well-established Jews with good connections, on whose marking as Jews special importance should be laid.⁴⁷

The original roster of 1,000 persons compiled by Eliáš's government for "presidential exemptions" included a stratum of old, established families known to have contributed greatly to Czech economic and public life. It is noteworthy that the NSDAP warned von Neurath (who himself was to confirm each case) beforehand that "the persons proposed by the president for exemption would be the most rabid anti-German elements in the Czech camp."⁴⁸

After protracted dealings and cynical comments from German quarters, Hácha assured the Reich Protector that "the main criteria will be henceforward the applicant's own attitude to Germandom or his family's, eventually his predecessors' relations [*sic*] to the Aryan world."⁴⁹ The rules for the respective candidates were carefully prepared

⁴⁵ For an analysis see Tomáš Pasák, "Aktivističtí novináři a postoj gen. Eliáše v roce 1941" in *Československý časopis historický*, XV, No.2 (1967), fn. 6, p.175.

⁴⁶ SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Hans Ullrich Geschke, head of the Gestapo in Prague had been collecting discriminating evidence on Eliáš as of autumn 1939. Pasák, *ibid.*, p.174; Kvaček-Tomášek, *Generál Alois Eliáš*, p.53.

⁴⁷ Cf. Kárny, Milotová, Moravcová, eds., *Anatomie*, doc. 84, p. 218.

⁴⁸ Communication of the office of the NSDAP to the Reich Protector (4.7.1939), see Miroslav Kárny, "Konečné řešení." *Genocida českých židů v německé protektorátní politice* (Prague: Academia, 1991), p.58.

⁴⁹ Hácha's response to von Neurath, 19.7. 1940, see *SÚA*, sign. ÚŘP, I- 3b-5801, box 388.

by the government and issued on July 4, 1940.⁵⁰ Finally, the reduced list of a total of forty-one applicants (twenty-seven men, and fourteen women who were Jewish wives of Aryan husbands) was presented to the Reich Protector on November 21, 1940. However, even this small number would not pass. Under-Secretary of State Burgsdorff bluntly informed Premier Eliáš, on January 14, 1941, that the list of individuals "could not convince him that there exists public interest to exempt them from the effectiveness of the law."⁵¹

Even Hácha's personal appeal to Karl Hermann Frank to extricate Prof. Hugo Siebenschein from the anti-Jewish law failed. His argument that the applicant's mother came from an old German-Protestant family and that "Siebenschein is engaged in compiling the Czech-German standard dictionary" did not impress Frank, who simply stated that "he was not able to help."⁵² The definitive answer was given on October 4, 1941, soon after Heydrich's arrival, asserting that "in principle no one could be exempted."⁵³

The political situation in the Protectorate in the summer of 1940 was greatly influenced by two major events: the defeat of France and Britain's recognition of the provisional Czechoslovak Government-in-exile. The fall of Paris had a grave psychological impact upon public opinion the world over. In the Czech lands apprehension rose as rumors circulated that certain files of the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris had fallen into the hands of the Gestapo.⁵⁴ This was actually evidenced by the massive arrest of Czech activists, conducted according to prepared lists: followers of Beneš, social-democrats, communists, teachers, priests, and intellectuals. Among the arrested was Dr. Otakar Klapka, the mayor of Prague and Eliáš's associate, whose functions included, among others, the allocation of financial support to the families of Resistance members.⁵⁵

The German authorities' surveillance of Premier Eliáš's activities is also reflected in the monthly report of the Security Police of July 1940. In reviewing political developments in the Protectorate and the all-pervasive fear ("*Angstpsychose*")

⁵⁰ Comments to the government draft proposal, July 4, 1939, *SÚA*, sign. PMR S, 1590/7-1040, vol.1, box 589.

⁵¹ State Under Secretary von Burgsdorff to Premier Eliáš, January 14, 1941, *SÚA*, PMR-S, 1590/7-1040, vol. I, box 589.

⁵² Tomášek-Kvaček, *Causa Emil Hácha*, p. 100.

⁵³ On behalf of the Reich Protector Dr. Walter Fuchs wrote the definite answer to Acting Prime Minister Krejčí, dated October 4, 1941; *SÚA*, PMR-S, 1590/7 1941, vol. 2, box 594.

⁵⁴ *DHČP*, I, July 7, 1940, doc. 404, p.544.

⁵⁵ Pasák, *Generál Alois Eliáš*, pp. 9-10; Kvaček- Tomášek, *General Alois Eliáš*, pp.62, 71.

prevalent among the public, the summary of the government meeting alludes sarcastically to Eliáš's "playing the role of a neutral arbitrator."⁵⁶

It is also interesting to note that among the Czech files the Nazis discovered in Paris were documents touching upon the negotiations between the World Jewish Congress representative and President Beneš after the outbreak of the war.⁵⁷ The main issue in these documents was the offer a \$ 5 million loan by friendly North American Jewish banks for the new "upbuilding of the Republic."⁵⁸

The triumphal victory of the Wehrmacht in Western Europe brought on the ostracization of the Jewish population. Without any German initiative, on October 9, 1940, Josef Nebeský, on behalf of the National Solidarity, asked the government to propose the introduction of the law "for the defense of Czech Aryan honor and blood." The Reich authorities, however, took no notice of the government's draft of October 24;⁵⁹ thus, the prime minister had to appeal for the second time. On April 3, 1941, in a letter addressed to Karl Herman Frank, Eliáš asked for his consent to the proposal. He claimed that "his government is being criticized that the Jewish question has not yet been solved in certain aspects and that thus far Jews were not forbidden to marry non-Jewish persons or prevented from having extramarital sexual relations with them."⁶⁰ Even though Eliáš pointedly indicated that he was being pressured by certain circles, his ostentatious backing of the proposal makes one wonder: did he believe that this was an empty gesture—an "opportunistic" overture — or was he signaling more flexibility and readiness to fall in line?

The premier's situation at this point became quite serious as new evidence of his involvement in underground activities had reached the German Security Service (SD). In February 1940, some of his contacts in Budapest who were assisting Czech military personnel in their flight abroad were tracked down by local security forces. The Hungarian authorities promptly briefed the German government on the case.⁶¹ Moreover, after Klapka and other members of the resistance had been interrogated, Elias realized that his life hung in the balance. It appears that, in late 1940, he made

⁵⁶ Monatsbericht Juli 1940, Sicherheitsdienst RFSS, SD-Leitabschnitt Prag, *SÚA*, ÚŘP-d, box 32.

⁵⁷ The offer was made through Siegmund Amarant, during Beneš's stay in Paris. See Walter Jacobi, *Země zaslíbená* (Prague: Orbis, 1943), pp. 9-11.
⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Minutes of the cabinet session, October 24, 1940, *SÚA*, PMR, box 4155.

⁶⁰ Eliáš to Frank, April 3, 1941, *SÚA*, ÚŘP, I-36-5880, box 390.

⁶¹ Ernst von Weizsäcker on March 27, 1940 claimed that Eliáš heads the clandestine organization.
SÚA, AA, 489807-489810, box 32a.

up his mind to flee via Belgrade to London, but because of the political changes in Yugoslavia (in early 1941) he had to cancel his plan.⁶² Eliáš 's fate was obviously sealed by that time. For their own reasons, however, the Germans continued postponing his final demise; most probably for the sake of the tranquility they needed in the Protectorate.

A special routine among the German authorities was to make use of intimidation, plots, and intrigues in order to arouse personal feuds and animosity among ministers, sowing tension and uncertainty as far as their terms of office were concerned. This situation is evident also from the messages sent to London as early as February 1940 by the Home Resistance. One special dispatch intimated: "If they [i.e., the government] will not act the way they are meant to they [the Germans] will install their own Vlastka government."⁶³

Although Dr. Beneš had asked his contacts at home not to cross the Rubicon in their deeds and proclamations,⁶⁴ it was only after the official recognition of the Czechoslovak Government-in-exile by Britain on April 21, 1941, that he became more resolute in his demands. He expressed his appreciation to General Eliáš for having contributed greatly to his work in England by paving the way for the recognition of the government, but, at the same time, he advised him to consider his resignation. He was convinced that the Government-in-exile would only profit by this step.⁶⁵

The German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, generated a new situation, and in the Protectorate a wave of sympathy and hope arose among the Czech population. Sabotage activities also became frequent. At the same time, anti-Soviet proclamations by the fascist groups and by State President Hácha could also be heard; even Dr. Beneš was attacked.⁶⁶ These attacks, of course, ran counter to the

⁶² See Pasák, *Generál Alois Eliáš*, pp. 9-10; Kvaček - Tomášek, *Generál Alois Eliáš*, p. 70.

⁶³ *DHČP*, II, February-March, doc. 383, pp. 510-511. See also, David Kelly, *The Czech Fascist Movement 1922-1942*, especially chapter, "The Unwanted Collaborators" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp.168-175.

⁶⁴ Message to Prague, May 11,1940, see Eliášová-Pasák, "Poznámky," pp.122-123; *DHČP*, II, June 3, 1941, doc. 444, p.609.

⁶⁵ *DHČP*, II, June 24, 1941, doc. 447, p.614; see also Beneš's explanations to Smutný of June 25,1941, why Hácha and Eliáš should resign, *DHČP*, II, doc. 448, p. 615.

⁶⁶ As of fall 1941 Hácha's stance vis-à-vis the London Government became rude and venomous. In one of his notorious proclamations he referred to Beneš's Jewish milieu thus: "...while under the genial command of the Führer the new European Order is being construed, the former President Beneš in London, obviously influenced by his Jewish milieu is heralding the lost case of the Reich's enemies." See *DHČP*, II, 4. 12. 1941, doc. 469, pp.644-645.

new line of policy and requirements from the "family" or "pseudo-family"—as the Czech President kept referring to his allies at home.

After having reassessed the impact of Hácha's latest activities, and even those of Premier Eliáš, Beneš found them counterproductive and, in many ways, harmful. He thus sent a special message on July 26, 1941, requesting their immediate resignation.⁶⁷ "Let them create a Quisling government"; or, "Let them abolish the Protectorate, it would be all the same." In response, in his last message sent to London on August 7, 1941, Eliáš assured Dr. Beneš he would resign "in case the Germans would try to impose new burdens, unbearable to the nation."⁶⁸

The crucial question then is: Why did Eliáš's government not resign? What made the premier evade keeping his promise to President Beneš? Was he perhaps ill-advised by other instances?

Let us recall that the launching of "Operation Barbarossa" and the Soviet Union's entrance into the war engendered elation and a new kind of rapprochement among the various fractions of the Home Resistance and, naturally, also with the strong illegal Communist cells. It is important to note that General Eliáš had twice asked Dr. Beneš to brief him on the issue of the Red Army and his own relations with the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ He himself, after the outbreak of the war, held regular contacts with some leading figures of the Prague Central Committee of the illegal Communist Party (ÚV KSČ).⁷⁰ Of special importance were his clandestine meetings in the capital (in public parks and cemeteries) with Milan Reiman (a Jew), who served as liaison between him and Kurt Beer-Konrad, linked at that time to the Soviet consulate general in Prague.⁷¹ Premier Eliáš met Reiman the last time on August 10, 1941, before the latter went into hiding, alarmed by the massive arrest of leading members of the KSC. During this meeting Reiman left Eliáš a memorandum (placed symbolically inside a copy of Kamil Krofta's book, *The Immortal Nation*). In that message Eliáš was urged, on the basis of historical-political analysis, "to turn to the East...the final victory of socialism

⁶⁷ For Beneš's message to Hácha and Eliáš of July 26, 1941, see Eliášová-Pasák, "Poznámky," pp.138-139.

⁶⁸ Eliáš's last message from Prague, August 7, 1941, *ibid.*, p.140.

⁶⁹ Pasák, *Generál Alois Eliáš*, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Eliášová-Pasák, "Poznámky," pp.112-114.

⁷¹ Livia Rothkirchen, "The Defiant Few: Jews and the Czech Inside Front 1938 - 1942," in *Yad Vashem Studies*, XIV (1981), pp.54, 72-73.

under the shield of the Soviet Union is a path preferable to the Western way of domination."⁷²

After his arrest, while at the notorious Pankrác prison, General Eliáš did his utmost to pass a message to Dr. František Berdych, a leading Communist activist jailed in the same prison, asking him not to disclose to his interrogators who "Novotný" was (this was one of Milan Reiman's aliases), as he was being searched for by the Gestapo.⁷³

On September 28, 1941, the day after Heydrich's arrival in Prague as acting Reich Protector, Eliáš was arrested and removed from his office.⁷⁴ We know that even before reaching his new destination, Heydrich had met with *S.A. Brigadeführer* Judge Otto Thierack, president of the Berlin People's Court (*Volksgeschichtshof*), who agreed to preside at Eliáš's trial. Three days later, on October 1, 1941 Eliáš was tried by a People's Court in Prague and sentenced to death for high treason.⁷⁵

Helmut Heiber, in his study *Der Fall Elias*,⁷⁶ records how insidiously the indictment had been construed by Heydrich, with the assistance of the SD. His removal had to be seen as a deterrent, signaling to the Czech people the new line of policy: Germanization, the destruction of the Czech resistance cells, and the launching of the mass deportation—i.e., the systematic decimation of the Jews.⁷⁷

Before his death sentence was pronounced, Eliáš was threatened with mass executions of Czechs and thus, under duress, signed a proclamation recommending to his nation "sincere loyalty to German hegemony" as the only way for its future existence.⁷⁸ This "legacy" was widely publicized in the press and on radio. For the purposes of German Intelligence, Eliáš's execution was delayed and was carried out eight months later, on June 19, 1942, during the retaliation for Heydrich's assassination. Some solace for the defiant legionnaire: he lived to learn about his arch-enemy's death.

⁷² Eliášová -Pasák, "Poznámky," p.114.

⁷³ Pasák, *Generál Alois Eliáš*, pp.25-26.

⁷⁴ For Heydrich's cable to Himmler of September 27, 1941, announcing the arrest of General Eliáš, see Miroslav Kárný, Jaroslava Mílová, Margita Kárná, eds., *Deutsche Politik im "Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren" unter Reinhard Heydrich 1941-1942, Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Metropol, 1997), doc. 12, p. 94.

⁷⁵ Heydrich's cable to Bormann regarding the trial of Eliáš, October 1, 1941, see *Deutsche Politik im Protektorat*, doc. 20, pp. 102-106.

⁷⁶ Helmut Heiber, "Zur Justiz im Dritten Reich: Der Fall Elias," in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 3 (1955), pp.275-296.

⁷⁷ Notes of a meeting about future plans in the Protectorate chaired by Heydrich, October 17, 1941, *Deutsche Politik im Protektorat*, doc. 33, pp. 147-157.

⁷⁸ During his trial at the People's Court in Prague in 1946, Karl H. Frank admitted that he threatened to kill 20,000 Czechs in case Eliáš would not issue his proclamation. See *Český národ soudí K. H. Franka* (Prag: Orbis, 1947), p. 90.

Before his execution he managed to smuggle out to his wife a last message from jail: "We shall prevail (*Zvítězíme!*)."⁷⁹

Among the sources examined for this article were the court proceedings of the trial. When reading the trial verdict, I came across a statement made by Eliáš, which was, surprisingly, not deleted by the censor but, thus far, has not been given proper appraisal. Obviously meant for posterity, as a disavowal of the very essence of Nazi policy, he seems to have formulated these two sentences with utmost care: "... he [Eliáš] found himself in a dilemma while having to choose between the moral imperative of humanness [*Menschlichkeit*] and the interests of the Reich. He thus decided to harm the Reich..."⁸⁰

Eliáš's strategy and his "double game" (as he himself admitted before the court) were analyzed in the perceptive studies of Tomáš Pasák and, more recently, in a new biography; however, some questions have not been answered definitively.

Milan Reiman, Eliáš's key liaison, was arrested during the infamous, Moscow-masterminded "Slánský trials" (directed against "bourgeois nationalism," Trotskyism, and Zionism), which took place in Prague in 1950-1952. Reiman was charged as an "imperialist agent" and, while in prison, was tortured to death by his jailors.⁸¹ He was most probably one of the persons who could have shed some light on the subject. The other liaison, Dr. Zdeněk Bořek-Dohalský of the PÚ, who delivered to Eliáš Dr. Beneš's demand that he resign, in late September 1941,⁸² was soon thereafter arrested by the Nazis. He was executed at Terezín on February 7, 1945.⁸³

With Heydrich's arrival a civil state of emergency was proclaimed throughout the country and lasted until the end of November 1941. Arrests became the order of the day. Around 4-5,000 persons were remanded; several hundred were put to death, among them many Jews; others were sent to concentration camps.⁸⁴ At the same time an en masse "cleansing" of the Jewish population got underway. The former "Center

⁷⁹ Pasák, *Generál Alois Eliáš*, p. 37.

⁸⁰ See Nuremberg Document NG-147, "Abschrift des Urteils des Volksgerichtes vom 1. Oktober 1941," p. 25.

⁸¹ Eliášová - Pasák, "Poznámky," pp.112-113.

⁸² Heydrich's letter to Hácha, referring to Bořek-Dohalský's last meeting with Premier Eliáš, *DHČP*, II, November 15, 1941, doc.464, p. 640.

⁸³ Jaroslav Drábek, *Z časů dobrých a zlých* (Prague: Vojenské nakladatelství, 1992), p. 91.

⁸⁴ For the list of persons executed during the first state of emergency, see Zlatuše Kukánová, "Seznam osob popravených za prvního stanného práva ve dnech 28. září až do 28. listopadu 1941," in *Pražský sborník historický*, XVIII (1985), pp. 98-126; Miroslav Ivanov, *The Assassination of Heydrich, 27 May 1942* (London: Hart Davis, MacGibbon, 1973), pp. 206-213.

for Emigration" under the name of "The Central Office for the Coordination of the Jewish Question" (Zentralstelle für die Regelung der Judenfrage), with the active cooperation of the Oberlandräte, carried out the deportation of Czech Jews to the annihilation camps. Czech officials and gendarmes were given functions such as auxiliary police, accompanying transports and the like, and mainly serving as camp guards and in the prison service.

On the eve of the mass deportation in October 1941, the National Solidarity, the acting Czech government, together with President Hácha, eager to share in the Jewish spoils, made a last joint effort and demanded full participation in the confiscation and isolation of the deportees. This was, however, denied. A cynical note dated December 3, 1941, ridiculing their alacrity, bluntly advised the president and government that "...It is solely the Reich authorities who are empowered to carry out anti-Jewish measures."⁸⁵

Heydrich's November 16, 1941 "Report on the Situation in the Protectorate," addressed to Bormann, outlined the basic principles in the reorganization of the German and Czech administration: "It is imperative to scrape holes into the autonomy, without however, jeopardizing the facade" (*"Die Autonomie auszuhöhlen, ohne die Fassade zu gefährden."*)⁸⁶

The new government, installed on January 19, 1942, was dominated by two vociferous collaborationists: Dr. Jaroslav Krejčí (a professor of law), the chairman or *Regierungsvorsitzender* (as the office of prime minister ceased to exist), and Colonel Emanuel Moravec, the minister of Education. Both men expressed their readiness to carry out Heydrich's political program in three areas: (1) close cooperation in the solution of all problems; (2) the reorientation of Czech education; and (3) the reeducation of the Czech population. The last clause referred to the suppression of the will of the people for self-determination and the indoctrination of the youth with the idea of the Greater Reich. For this purpose a number of institutions and organizations were established. Thus the new ministers became, in Heydrich's phrase, "an extended arm of the Reich Protector."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ For an exchange of letters see *Deutsche Politik im Protektorat*, doc. 24 and 44, pp. 128-129, 174.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Heydrich's report to Bormann about the situation in the Protectorate, November 16, 1941, doc. 51, p. 189.

⁸⁷ Heydrich's secret talk of February 4, Cestmir Amort, *Heydrichiada. Documenty* (Prague: Vojenske nakladatelstvi, 1964), pp.126-147; cf. Brandes, *Die Tschechen*, pp. 217 – 219; The last report about

After Heydrich's assassination on May 27, 1942, a state of emergency was again proclaimed. A new wave of intimidation was launched; arrests and executions occurred daily. Kurt Daluge, who, at Hitler's order, replaced Heydrich, issued a decree on July 3, 1942, according to which those who harbored elements hostile to the Reich would be punished by death. The list of culprits sentenced by Special Courts in Prague and Brno were cited daily in the press and over the radio. Among those executed during this period, more than a dozen people, described as destructive elements (*Volkschädlinge*), were killed in Pankrác prison for helping Jews and thus "sabotaging the German order for the solution of the Jewish question."⁸⁸

Up to now research in general has centered more pointedly on the policy of Dr. Beneš's government-in-exile vis-à-vis the Jewish plight. The attitudes of the "Inside Front" in the Protectorate proper were overlooked for many decades. One of the reasons was the lack of documentation since certain collections were kept under lock and key in the state archives during the Communist regime. A further reason was the inadequate amount of testimony and memoir literature, an outcome of political developments until the November 1989 Revolution.⁸⁹

Needless to say, Beneš's position abroad was greatly influenced by the situation in the Protectorate and especially by the stance of the various groups of the Home Resistance. Thus, from the very beginning, the growing anti-Jewish propaganda and the populist hatred nurtured by the various fascist groups acted as a barrier between him and the Jewish representatives abroad. Dr. Beneš was apprehensive lest the high number of Jews in the newly formed military units be used against him in the propaganda, as if he were establishing a "Jewish army."⁹⁰In effect, this caused him, among others, in 1940, to delay the participation of Jewish representatives on the State Council. Dr. Beneš kept saying that he was being attacked daily in the press as a "Jewish lackey."⁹¹

the situation in the Protectorate, sent by Heydrich to Bormann, May 18, 1942 (instructions for the reeducation of the Czech youth), *Deutsche Politik im Protektorat*, doc. 98, pp. 266-268.

⁸⁸ For a list of persons executed on charges of harboring Jews, see *Heroes and Victims*, Preface by Jan Masaryk, Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Information Service (London: Lincolns-Prager, 1945).

⁸⁹ For a survey of historiography during the Communist era, see Livia Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," in David S. Wyman, ed., *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 172-193.

⁹⁰ Livia Rothkirchen, "The Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile: Jewish and Palestinian Aspects in the Light of Documents," in *Yad Vashem Studies*, IX (1973), p. 162.
⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.194.

I have dealt with the attitude of the Home Resistance and their ambivalent stance toward the Jewish problem in my earlier research. Nevertheless, I wish to underscore that the clandestine organization "We Shall Remain Faithful" Petition Committee (Petiční výbor "Věrní zůstaneme"), with several well-known Jewish intellectuals and public figures (Docent Josef Fischer, Dr. Karel Bondy, Dr. František Kaufmann and Anna Pollertová) among its leading members, especially kept urging the government-in-exile to act on behalf of the Jews.⁹² After the arrest of Fischer, Bondy, Kaufmann and Pollertová in the autumn of 1941, we can hardly find sympathetic references to the plight of the Jews. We may even speak about an open anti-Jewish line being adopted by the Communist Resistance prior to the end of the war.⁹³

It is a sad fact, but the post-war so-called retribution trials were greatly influenced by the ongoing strife between the members of the London emigration and the Communist activists who had spent the war years in Moscow. The courts were mainly concerned with political offences—"the collaboration of members of the Protectorate Government with the arch enemy during the period of greatest menace."⁹⁴ The judges themselves related to the Jewish issue only marginally. The issue of Jewish persecution was dealt with solely in the trials of the Nazi chieftains; first and foremost in the trials of State Secretary Karl Hermann Frank and the commandants and guards of the Ghetto of Terezín.⁹⁵

A nation's conduct is not only measured by collaboration or resistance, but also by the stance taken by the mainstream population. Research on this subject indicates that in effect only certain segments were involved in active resistance. According to the reports of the secret police, it was mainly the upper class (*die Oberschichte*) from which the so-called "Jew-lovers" came.⁹⁶ Indeed, the questionable position of the

⁹² See Rothkirchen, "The Defiant Few," pp. 57-63.

⁹³ See message from Prague, sent by Antonín Brabec via Ankara, to the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile in London, August 10, 1943, *DHČP*, II, doc. 518, p. 721; also Livia Rothkirchen, "Czech Attitudes toward the Jews during the Nazi Regime," in *Yad Vashem Studies*, XIII (1979), pp. 316-319.

⁹⁴ Karel Kaplan, *Dva retribuční procesy; komentované dokumenty 1946-1947* (Prague: ČAV, 1992); see also Vilém Prečan, *V kradeném čase, Výběr ze studií, článků a úvah z let 1973-1993* (Prague: ČAV, 1994), pp. 31-33; Mečislav Borák, *Spravedlnost podle dekretu, Retribuční soudnictví v ČSR a Mimořádný lidový soud v Ostrave (1945 – 1948)* (Ostrava: Tilia, 1998).

⁹⁵ *Český národ soudí K. H. Franka*; Mimořádný Lidový soud, Litoměřice, *SOAL*, sign. LS 86/48.

⁹⁶ This view is based on the monthly secret police reports in the fatal year of 1941. More recently two articles dealt with the issue on the basis of German secret police reports (Meldungen) and the press: 1) Helena Krejčová, Anna Hydráková, "Postoj Čechůk Židům; z politického zpravodajství okupační správy a protektorátního tisku," in *Soudobé dějiny* 4/95 (1995), pp. 578-608; 2) Jaroslava Milotová, "Die Protektoratspresse und die 'Judenfrage'," Miroslav Kárný, Raimund Kempe und Margita Kárná, eds., *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente, 1996* (Prague: Academia, 1996), pp. 153-183.

working class, favoured by the Nazi regime for its crucial contribution to the war effort and silenced during the Communist era, would require special, in-depth examination.

Even though sympathies manifested by Czech individuals, either secretly or openly, were more frequent than in the neighbouring states, in reality the great silence of popular opinion was the prevalent attitude during the deportations.⁹⁷ Here, however, two factors have to be taken into consideration: on the one hand, the venomous antisemitic agitation of the fascist circles and the collaborationist government; on the other hand, the intimidation campaign and the draconian laws instituted by the occupation forces against people who tried to reach out in some way to Jews.

"The social estrangement between the 'Aryans' and the 'non-Aryans' which of necessity set in during the Protectorate, persisted after the war and never disappeared entirely," wrote Dr. Kurt Wehle, the chairman of the post-war Supreme Council of the Jewish Communities in Bohemia and Moravia.⁹⁸

Czech Jewry was in effect extinguished. Of a pre-war Jewish population of approximately 118,000, around 8-10 percent survived the war. Dr. Jaroslav Drábek, prosecutor of the retribution trials held in 1946, said in his speech: "Of entire generations, lineages of Jewish families, only pitiable remnants survived; individuals, who by sheer coincidence escaped death."⁹⁹

Unlike in other countries under German occupation, we do not know of appeals lodged to the Czech government by either the Jewish leadership or by individuals protesting the law of exclusion from public life. From the recollections and comments of some noted authorities on Protectorate policy and former Prague community officials, we learn that they considered the members of the Eliáš government "powerless" and incapable of acting on their behalf.¹⁰⁰

Although short-lived, Eliáš's government left some indelible marks. Heydrich himself ironically described it as "the government of proud silence" (*die Regierung des*

⁹⁷ The question of passivity and indifference was first given attention in the novel of Josef Škvorecký, *Zbabělci* (The Cowards), published in 1958. However, it was Jan Tesař's seminal study that brought into focus the issue of collaboration. See Jan Tesař, "K problému nacistické okupační politiky v Protektorátě v r. 1939" in *Historie a vojenství*, No.1 (1969), p. 75; idem, "Vlastenci a bojovníci," in *Listy*, II, No. 6, 24. 4. 1969.

⁹⁸ Kurt Wehle, "The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia 1945-1948," in Avigdor Dagan, Gertrude Hirschler, Lewis Weiner, eds., *The Jews of Czechoslovakia, Historical Studies and Surveys*, Vol.III (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984), p.512.

⁹⁹ For Dr. Jaroslav Drábek's speech see *Český národ soudí K. H. Franka*, p. 137.

¹⁰⁰ Notes of the author on views exchanged with Dr. J.W.Bruegel (London, 1964) and Dr. Kurt Wehle (New York, 1966).

stolzen Schweigens), branding its activities as sheer "connivance" meant to outwit the German authorities.¹⁰¹ George Kennan, recalling the esprit of "the brave soldier Schweik," added this whimsical characterization of the Czech government's mentality and tactics: "... a boggling willingness to comply with any and all demands and an equally baffling ability to execute them in such a way that the effect is quite different from that contemplated by those who did the commanding."¹⁰²

In the first postwar years General Eliáš was hailed as a hero by both the western emigration and the Communists; he was posthumously decorated by President Beneš. Several leading members of the KSC, paying tribute to his heroism, described his tactics as "Wallenrodism" (a reference to Mickiewicz's famous epos "Konrad Wallenrod," who sought to serve his nation as a "traitor"). However, some controversy persisted over his role, mainly after the Communist takeover, when Eliáš was occasionally labelled as "a lackey of the Western powers."¹⁰³ The definitive evaluation of his role has yet to be written.

In conclusion, three cardinal issues exemplify the singularity of the solution of the Jewish question in the Protectorate. As we have described, the Nazis' devious attempt to lure Premier Eliáš into "adopting" the racial definition at his own volition failed. This was a significant development as the Nazis had hoped (1) to demonstrate the Czechs' acceptance of the New Order, and (2) to present them in the eyes of the free world as the vanguard of racist legislation in Europe, thereby discrediting Masaryk's Republic. Eliáš's rejection of the Nuremberg Laws is therefore meaningful and of special symbolic value.

The intricate issue of "exceptions" also took a different course in the Protectorate. While Eliáš's government utterly failed in its efforts to exempt any category or even individual Jews from the effectiveness of the law, in Vichy France, Slovakia, and Hungary, a number of long-time residents and war veterans were granted this favor. In Germany proper there also existed a category of "privileged" individuals, as illustrated in the macabre case of the "*Prominenten*" in Theresienstadt.¹⁰⁴ In this context Heydrich's command on the eve of the deportations of the Protectorate Jews is

¹⁰¹ See Reinhard Heydrich to *Reichsleiter* Bormann, Prag, January 22, 1942; Heydrich's secret talk of February 4, 1942, Amort, Heydrichiada; cf. Brandes, *Die Tschechen*, pp. 217 – 219.

¹⁰² Kennan, *From Prague after Munich*, pp.117-118.

¹⁰³ Eliášová - Pasák, *Poznámky*, pp.110-114.

¹⁰⁴ For the list of "prominents" and other documentation printed in Anna Hyndráková, Helena Krejčová, Jana Svobodová, eds., *Prominenti v ghetu Terezín 1942-1945*, Dokumenty (Prague: ČAV, 1996).

most revealing: "No consideration at all should be given to Jews who possess war decorations..." (*"Es soll keine Rücksicht auf Juden mit Kriegsauszeichnungen genommen werden..."*)¹⁰⁵

Lastly, while in all other countries under German tutelage the Nazi chieftains openly encouraged the local authorities' cooperation both in the process of confiscation of Jewish property and the deportation "to the East," Krejčí's Czech government, notwithstanding its eager offer to collaborate, was denied this privilege.

Each generation views historical events through its own spectacles. Recently, following the volte-face in Eastern Europe, the issue of moral responsibility has gained new regard. After long decades of silence, statesmen in Slovakia, Hungary, and also in France have made open proclamations, asserting their involvement as "accomplices" in the perpetration of the "Final Solution." The Czech nation, as a whole, escaped this stigma because it was the Reich Protector who had had jurisdiction over the Jewish community, and the German executive organs themselves carried out the mass deportations to the death camps. This line of strategy adopted by the Nazi authorities in the Protectorate was consistent with Hitler's ultimate aim—the post-war solution of the Czech question¹⁰⁶ through the incorporation of the lands of Bohemia and Moravia into the "Thousand Year Great German Reich." Therein lies its singularity.

Source: Yad-Vashem Studies, Vol. XXVII, Jerusalem 1999, pp. 331- 362

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of the talks at Heydrich's office in Prague about "the Final Solution of the Jewish Question in the Protectorate," October 10, 1941, see *Deutsche Politik im Protektorat*, doc. 29, p.138.

¹⁰⁶ For a seminal view of French scholars regarding Hitler's global, post-war aims in "New Europe," see, Jean-Pierre Azema and Francois Bedarida, eds., *La regime de Vichy et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), pp. 57-67.