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## *The Holocaust in Hungary in Contexts. New Perspectives and Research Results*

Ferenc Laczó

Special Editor of the Thematic Issue

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András Szécsényi

## Development and Bifurcation of an Institution The University Voluntary Labor Service and the Compulsory National Defense Labor Service of the Horthy Era

Previous studies of the Hungarian labor service have been characterized by an exclusive interest in the years between 1939 and 1945. Accordingly, they have tended to focus on its anti-Jewish impetus. However, the emergence of labor service in Hungary goes back to the mid-1930s, when a voluntary system was established. Placing this Hungarian institution into a transnational perspective, I trace the process of its ideological legitimation, its key practices, and its gradual growth and significant transformation over the years. I demonstrate that Hungary actually had two divergent systems of labor services in the war years, and I analyze the ways in which the infamous labor service of the post-1939 years could be seen as a continuation of its less familiar predecessor. I thus make a contribution to the historicization and broader contextualization of a key Hungarian institution of persecution during World War II.

Keywords: Hungarian labor service, history of state institutions, prehistory of the persecution of Jews, anti-Semitic radicalization, interwar Hungary

### *Introduction*

In recent years, a great deal of scholarship has been published in Hungary on the subject of labor service during World War II, some of which goes well beyond description and the cataloguing of facts and reflects on questions of conceptual importance. However, to the present day the vast majority of the secondary literature on the institution of labor service and therefore also most of public discussion on the subject is still under the strong influence of the scholarship of Elek Karsai, Randolph L. Braham, and other historians which began to emerge in the 1960s (though I concede that there are exceptional works of scholarship on the subject worthy of acknowledgment).<sup>1</sup> Labor service thus

1 Over the past few decades, Hungarian and international historical scholarship and scholars of the Holocaust have published significant source works, monographs, and numerous essays on the subject of Jewish forced labor during World War II. In addition, many memoirs written by people who worked in the forced labor camps and squadrons have been published. One should mention first and foremost the following: Randolph L. Braham, *A népiértés politikája. A Holocaust Magyarországon*, vol. 2 (Budapest: Belvárosi, 1990), 677–1474; Idem, *The Hungarian Labor Service System, 1939–1945* (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1997); Idem, *The Wartime System of Labor Service in Hungary. Varieties of Experiences* (Boulder–

continues to be regarded essentially as a system that was established in the course of the war to effectuate the isolation and later murder of the Jews. The study of the fates of the Jews, Christians who were legally defined as Jews, members of Churches and national minorities that were persecuted by the state, people convicted for so-called crimes against public decency, and in 1944 some of the Roma population, in other words all the people who were forced to endure the humiliation and suffering of being members of the labor battalions and squadrons that were created as part of the Hungarian Royal Army and who in some cases were brutally massacred, was unquestionably one of the most important tasks awaiting historians.

At the same time, until very recently the mainstream historical literature in Hungary has made precious little mention of the fact that forced labor as an institution did not begin with the often cited 1939: II (civil defense) act, but rather had been established years earlier. As early as the summer of 1935, there were so-called labor service camps for college and university students, though they functioned on an entirely voluntary basis.<sup>2</sup> I intend to show in this essay that there were significant interconnections between the organization and history of the voluntary labor service for university students in Hungary and the system of compulsory labor that later was to become one of the tools in the virtual annihilation of Hungarian Jewry. The former system served as the basis for the latter during the period that began in the summer of 1939 and ended in the spring of 1944, when the voluntary and compulsory labor service systems existed side by side. The similarities between the two institutions, which

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New York: Social Science Monographs—The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, Graduate Center, CUNY, 1995); Tibor Mózes, ed., *Egy "szerecsés" munkásszázad. Volt munkaszolgálatosok visszaemlékezései, 1942–1945. Galánta, Kápolnásnyék, Győr, Mosonmagyaróvár* (Budapest: a publication of Zoltán Szirtes, 1985); "Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön...", *Dokumentumok a munkaszolgálat történetéhez Magyarországon*, 2 vols., ed. Elek Karsai (Budapest: Magyar Izraeliták Országos Irodája, 1962); László Karsai, *Holokausz* (Budapest: Pannonica, 1998); Robert Rozett, *Conscripted Slaves: Hungarian Jewish Forced Laborers on the Eastern Front During the Second World War* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2014); Szabolcs Szita, ed., *Iratok a kiegészítő munkaszolgálat, a zsidóüldözés történetéhez*, 3 vols. (Budapest: Magyar Auschwitz Alapítvány–Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ, 2002); Idem, "A munkaszolgálat Magyarországon 1939–1945," *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 117 (2004): 817–57; Idem, *Halálérőd. A munkaszolgálat és a hadimunka történetéhez, 1944–1945* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1989); Idem, "Történelmi áttekintés a munkaszolgálatról (1941–1945)," *Holocaust Füzetek* 2 (1993): 26–33; Idem, *Munkaszolgálat Magyarországon nyugati határán. A Birodalmi Védőállás építése 1944–1945* (Budapest: ELTE BTK, 1990).

2 I recently summarized my opinion on this question and pointed out the lacunae in the scholarship and the misleading interpretations that have been offered: András Szécsényi, "Fogalomtörténelmi vázlat a munkaszolgálatról," *Betekintő* 8, no. 3 (2014), accessed May 3, 2015, [http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2014\\_3\\_szecsenyi.pdf](http://www.betekinto.hu/sites/default/files/2014_3_szecsenyi.pdf).

shared common roots, were so strong that the same Hungarian term was used to designate them, “*munkaszolgálat*,” which is a simple translation of the German term “*Arbeitsdienst*.” Thus, the institution itself was hardly a Hungarian peculiarity, notwithstanding the claims of some historians and scholars to the contrary, and in order to arrive at an understanding of its history one must adopt comparative and transnational perspectives.

Given the aforementioned lacunae in the secondary literature, I begin with a brief presentation of the ways in which the interwar labor service functioned in an international context and then offer a brief summary of the distinctive features of the voluntary labor service that came into being in Hungary in 1935. I then turn to the focus of my inquiry, the interconnections between the system of voluntary labor service and the system of compulsory labor service.

### *Hungarian Labor Service in an International Context*

The shock of World War I dramatically changed the relationships between the old and newly created states of Europe and their respective societies. The different countries adopted varying economic strategies in the fight against rampant unemployment. In the democratic countries, alongside state efforts to revitalize the economies with injections of capital, planned employment, and industrial and economic development, a kind of “self-help” program was also launched in the civil sector. The idea of labor camps began to take form during the great calamity of World War I, and it spread relatively rapidly across Europe.<sup>3</sup> For the growing numbers of unemployed who belonged to the middle class, some of the youth groups initiated independently organized enterprises and campaigns that helped put money in the pockets of people who had lost their jobs without taking employment away from people who were seeking work. The participants (women were not allowed to join) worked in labor camps, usually in the countryside, where they took part in projects that were useful to the local communities, such as road construction or repair, regulation of rivers, or logging.<sup>4</sup> In many places, university and (even more frequently) college students

3 By the mid 1930s, the system had spread across Europe. Its deepest roots, however, were found in Switzerland, Germany, Bulgaria, Italy, and the Scandinavian countries. As surprising as it may seem, to this day there is no up-to-date scholarship on the European systems of labor service. The history of the labor service in Germany represents something of an exception to this rule, as research on the subject began to gather momentum in the 1960s.

4 Schweizerische Zentralstelle für Freiwilligen Arbeitsdienst, hrsg., *Arbeitsdienst in 13 Staaten. Problemlösungen* (Zürich–Leipzig: Orell–Füssli, 1938).

formed work details on their own, and they sometimes even received modest payment for their work. With the passing of years, a professional system of university or student labor service emerged in many of the countries of Europe.

One of the most effective systems, the so-called *Schweizerischen Zentralstelle für Freiwilligen Arbeitsdienst* (Swiss Center for Voluntary Labor Service, or SZFA) emerged in Switzerland in 1925. In 1935, the Swiss state even codified it by law and developed it professionally. Federal state, provincial, and student bodies all had representation in the leadership of the SZFA, as did the political parties.<sup>5</sup> The institution had appeared in many other places as well. By 1939, it was found in a total of twenty different countries (in Denmark it appeared in 1917, in Sweden and Bulgaria in 1920, in Norway in 1922, in England, Romania, and Holland in 1931, and in Germany in 1933, growing out of initiatives that had been launched in 1931). As was the case in Hungary, in the mid-1930s similar institutions were created in Estonia and Latvia (1934), Belgium (1935), and Greece and Spain (1937).<sup>6</sup> Movements similar to the labor service institutions cropping up in the interwar period also emerged in several countries outside of Europe. Though they may have varied in their programs, comparable initiatives were found in the United States, New Zealand, Canada, China, Australia, and Japan.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, labor service movements were usually successful in Europe in the interwar period and enjoyed popularity as a means of organizing. In their essential developmental and operational structures the various institutions were similar. College and university students created them for the males among them,<sup>8</sup> and then, with the passing of time, the ministries of labor and education in the various countries professionalized them and passed laws ensuring their continued operation. The labor camps brought no short term economic gain. At most, they helped strengthen the middle class materially and helped narrow the gap between different social groups. It is worth noting that the labor service

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5 The voluntary summer labor camps, in which unemployed youths and students between the ages of 16 and 24 were given work, were in operation up until the outbreak of World War II. They were under the authority of a body of the economic cabinet in charge of labor service (the Eidgenössische Zentralstelle für Arbeitsbeschaffung). See Hermann Müller-Brandenburg, *Der Arbeitsdienst fremder Staaten* (Leipzig: Nationale Aufbau, 1938), 62–66.

6 Ibid.

7 Kenneth Holland, *Youth in European Labor Camps* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1939), 279–87.

8 In some countries (Germany, Bulgaria, England, Holland, Poland, and Austria, and as of 1937 also Hungary), separate camps were established for women. However, with the exception of the camps in Germany, these camps only involved providing work for some few hundred unemployed women a year. They were insignificant in comparison to the camps for men. Holland, *Labor Camps*, 242–67.

programs in most of the countries accepted volunteers from abroad at the time. However, in part precisely because of their success, in some countries the tendency was not to maintain the voluntary nature of the institution but rather to nationalize it and make it obligatory. For instance, in the summer of 1939, forced labor service was introduced in Hungary (as I will discuss in greater detail later).

Since the institution of labor service in Hungary was inspired essentially by the German model, it is worth taking a moment to examine a few details of the latter. The work of Kiran Klaus Patel is of particular significance in the secondary literature of the past fifteen years. Patel has written not only shorter essays and articles on the subject, but also an excellent, balanced monograph.<sup>9</sup> While the German cabinets were unreceptive to these kinds of initiatives for a long time, on June 5, 1931, the Brüning government established the *Freiwilliger Arbeitsdienst* (Voluntary Labor Service, FAD). By 1932, there were 200,000 young unemployed people working as volunteers in the FAD camps (which were separate for men and women).<sup>10</sup> The work that they did, however, did not have any significant influence on Germany's economy, in part because of the failure of the state to show any common resolve. Following Hitler's rise to power, the Nazis threw themselves into economic planning with an unprecedented zeal. Their initiatives exerted a strong influence on the agrarian sector,<sup>11</sup> and they envisioned a central role for the transformed FAD within this framework.<sup>12</sup> In 1935, the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reich Labor Service, RAD), which functioned as a kind of successor to the FAD, came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, where it remained until 1943, when it became independent. Field Marshal Konstantin Hierl, the director of the RAD, worked together with the specialists in the Ministry of Interior to develop the Nazi model of the labor

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9 Kiran Klaus Patel, *Soldiers of Labor. Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

10 For a summary of the operative mechanisms of FAD see: Peter Dudek, *Erziehung durch Arbeit. Arbeiterlagerbewegung und Freiwilliger Arbeitsdienst 1920–1935* (Oplanden: Leske&Budrich, 1988) and Wolfgang Benz, "Vom Freiwilligen Arbeitsdienst zur Arbeitsdienstpflicht," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 16, no. 4 (1968): 317–46; Hartmut Heyck, "Labour Services in Weimar Republic and their Ideological Godparents," *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 4 (2003): 221–36.

11 Kiran Klaus Patel, "The Paradox of Planning. German Agricultural Policy in a European Perspective, 1920s to 1970s," *Past & Present* 59, no. 8 (2011): 239–42.

12 Kiran Klaus Patel, *Soldiers of Labor. Labor Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 64.



service institution, a model based on the notion that participation should be compulsory.

The Nazi leadership saw the practical uses of labor service, which extended beyond the propagation of the notion of a community of the national “Volk” (or *Volksgemeinschaft*) and the creation of a corps that would provide a useful precursor to military training. The labor service helped take young people off the labor market and thereby ensured that there would be more employment opportunities for married men with children. Later, when large state investments were being made to promote development, unemployment dropped and the task of finding a job was no longer as burdensome as it had been, other volunteer workers were accepted into the labor service in the agricultural sector. At the same time, the rigid, pyramid-like hierarchical structure of RAD differed significantly from the considerably more flexible structures of the other labor service systems, and it was very clearly part of the Nazi state organization. Some historians have contended that in its composition and development it most clearly resembled the Nazi party itself.<sup>13</sup>

In the meantime, however, RAD represented a significant cost for the state, no less than 1.4 percent of the state budget annually in the period between 1933 and 1944 and rising at times to as much as 2.1 percent.<sup>14</sup> According to economic historian Timothy W. Mason, it is not really possible to determine whether RAD actually brought in income for the state or not, i.e. whether or not it was actually an economic asset.<sup>15</sup> Even if it did not have any immediate economic use for the state in the years leading up to the war, however, it is quite certain that it at least temporarily led to a clear drop in unemployment. The kinds of projects and endeavors that were undertaken resembled the projects and works done by labor service groups in other European countries, including for instance road construction and repair, swamp draining, flood prevention, and agricultural work. In addition to seasonal work, the tasks performed by labor service groups in cities also had lasting results. Landscaping and the renovation and reparation of public buildings owned by the state or by municipalities, for instance, won the labor service widespread respect and popularity.

13 Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich* (London–New York: Longman, 1981), 155.

14 Patel, *Soldiers of Labor*, 108, 188.

15 Timothy W. Mason, *Social Policy of the Third Reich. The Working Class and the “National Community”* (Providence–Oxford: Berg, 1993), 125–26. In contrast, the contemporary German and Hungarian compilations of statistics emphasized the positive value of the work projects. See for instance Béla Szinay, *Magyar nemzeti munkaszolgálat* (Budapest: n.p., 1939), 8.

As of 1939, participation in work involving the war industry and munitions became increasingly important.<sup>16</sup> In 1941, the range of tasks performed by RAD broadened as it undertook projects that provided assistance to the Wehrmacht all over Europe, including road maintenance, repairs to and oversight of the supply lines between the front and the hinterland, and work involving anti-aircraft defense. RAD battalions were even deployed on the Eastern Front. The labor camp inmates (as participation was compulsory it seems reasonable to use this term), who lived in barracks, were required to do ten hours of work a day. In addition to the physical strain of the work, the compulsory national socialist exercises and singing, which were intended to create a sense of communal experience and fate, were also important factors, as was the military training in the interest of ensuring effective preparation for service as soldiers conscripted into the Wehrmacht. In exchange for their service, they were given very modest pay.<sup>17</sup>

The structure of the women's camps did not undergo comparable changes, and this was closely tied to the notion of the role women were to play in the Nazi state. Women did not work in labor camps. Rather, in a system that represented a transformation and further development of the FAD system of women's camps,<sup>18</sup> after having presented themselves in a RAD center, women were sent in groups of 5 to 30 people to smaller state farms or peasant families. As a work force, until 1939 they were used exclusively in agriculture, which meant, first and foremost, summer harvest work or, in the case of the women who lodged with peasant families, housework and childcare. Since no changes were made in the development of labor service for females after 1935, the involvement of the private sector in the distribution of work served the needs of the government splendidly. At the same time, the leadership of the RAD, together with the Nazi Party, found the participants in female labor service to be of considerable

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16 Heinrich Himmler took control of some of the concentration camps from RAD and put them under the authority of the SS, as indeed he said he would do at a meeting of the SS leadership in January, 1937. The network of barracks, which were Spartan in their furnishings, simply continued to be used as concentration camps, the camp at Esterwegen in Emsland, for instance, which later grew into the Sachsenhausen and Oranienburg camps. No changes were made to the task workers were expected to perform, namely draining swamps, but now most of the workers were communist and Jewish prisoners. For more, see: Roderick Stackelberg–Sally A. Winkle, eds., *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook. An Anthology of Texts* (London–New York: Routledge, 2002), 205–06.

17 For an excellent summary of the vast German secondary literature on the subject, I recommend, on the functioning of RAD, Patel, *Soldiers of Labor*.

18 Gertrud Bäumer, *Der freiwillige Arbeitsdienst der Frauen* (Leipzig: R. Boiglanders Verlag, 1933), 8–16.

use from the perspective of the Nazi propaganda, as the institution seemed to symbolize the idea of communal effort in the service of the German nation (or “Volk”).

### *The Introduction of Labor Service in Hungary*

Naturally, these international initiatives and models found echoes in Hungary. In 1929, the so-called Turul High Command<sup>19</sup> (the Turul Association was the most significant organization of university youth in the Horthy era) sent János Salló to a work camp in England to persuade him of the potential importance of the institution. In 1930, László Tarnói Kostyál took a similar trip to Switzerland to examine work camps first hand.<sup>20</sup> Between 1931 and 1934, Salló visited three other work camps outside of Hungary (one in Switzerland, one in Wales, and one in England) where roads were under construction to gather further information.<sup>21</sup> In May 1932, the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education had been presented with a detailed and ambitious plan.<sup>22</sup> In 1935, the Turul member associations began requesting financial support from the Dean of the University of Budapest to cover the costs of work camps.<sup>23</sup>

Following long negotiations, in June 1935 the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education ratified the final labor service plan.<sup>24</sup> According to this plan, 50 students and 50 local unemployed construction workers or day-laborers would work for four weeks along the banks of the Maros River

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19 Since the foundation of the mass organization in 1919, the High Command was the leading body of Turul. Chief Commanders were elected annually at the camp of delegates but were eligible for reelection. The Chief Commander could appoint members of his High Command who were responsible for specific portfolios such as, for instance, international relations.

20 László Tarnói Kostyál was one of the most agile and radically anti-Semitic student leaders in the 1930s. We know little about his life outside of his activity in the work camps and fraternal societies. He is not even mentioned in the archival documents of the state security forces. His name can be found in a number of different version in the contemporary sources. For the sake of consistency, I have used Tarnói Kostyál throughout this essay. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL) K 636 VKM box 705., batch 98. A Turul Szövetség általános ügyei 1932–1936 [General affairs of the Turul Association, 1932–1936]. János Salló’s Journey to English, July 14–18, 1934.

21 MNL OL K 636 VKM box 704, batch 98. A Turul Szövetség általános ügyei 1932–1936 batch 98. 8.

22 This was the first and last time that the idea was raised of uniting the large student associations in this way, naturally under the guidance of Turul principles. MNL OL K 636 VKM box 704, batch 98. A Turul Szövetség általános ügyei 1932–1936. batch 98. Correspondence 6–7.

23 ELTE Archives, 7/c. 1935–36/3980.

24 MNL OL K 636 VKM box 704, batch 98. A Turul Szövetség általános ügyei 1932–1936. batch 98. Correspondence, 47.

rebuilding the dams and embankments which had been deliberately sabotaged by Romanians during the floods of 1932. This goal harmonized with the visions of a prominent trend in Hungarian culture and public life in the interwar period that focused on both the traditions and the plight of the peasantry, a trend that was influenced in part by so-called “village researchers,” who traveled to rural communities to document the culture of rural Hungary and the circumstances in which people lived. It also served the frequently reiterated propaganda goals of the government. Behind the populist visions, which were unquestionably demagogical to some degree, there was a desire on both sides to address serious social issues. At the same time, the adoption of the German model would not have been possible without the participation of pro-Nazi circles of the coalition. The Turul High Command named Tarnói Kostyál, who was a radical racist, to the position of leader of the Labor Camp Committee and made Mihály Somlai, who was connected to populist writers, his deputy.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, however, the Turul Coalition would not have been successful in these ventures had it not enjoyed the financial support of and connections provided by the governing party, the extreme right wing, and prominent figures of political, economic, and social life. These individuals were given roles in the leading bodies of the labor service.<sup>26</sup> While I cannot go into great detail on the subject within the scope of this article, it is worth noting that support for the institution of labor service in Hungary was relatively widespread and included a heterogeneous array of segments of Hungarian society.<sup>27</sup> However, despite the support it enjoyed from successive governments and the positive responses from a wide cross-section of society, the system nonetheless was criticized harshly by some circles of the far right-wing and the left-wing of the populists.<sup>28</sup>

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25 Ibid., 16.

26 I examine these interconnections in András Szécsényi, “A Turul Szövetség akciói: a Magyar Egészség Hete és a Magyar Nép Hete,” in *Vázlatok két évszázad magyar történelméből*, ed. Jenő Gergely (Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2010), 191–204; Dr. László Tharnói Kostyál, *Főiskolai önkéntes munkatábor* (Budapest: Turul, 1935).

27 For a more detailed discussion see András Szécsényi, “Egyetemi és főiskolai munkatáborok Magyarországon 1935–1939,” in *Visszatekintés a 19–20. századra*, ed. Gábor Erdődy (Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2011), 149–65.

28 András Szécsényi, “‘Áldásos munkát!’ Egyetemisták és főiskolások női munkaszolgálat,” *Katonaijság* 3, no. 2 (2012): 38–46. Regarding the critical assessments, see “Munkatábor-ankét az egyetemi Körben,” *Hungária*, February 9, 1937, and Péter Veres, “Ankét – A fiatal magyar értelmiség és a falu,” *Jelenkor* 2, no. 1–2 (1937): 12. At the same time, in the spring of 1939 the Arrow Cross Party saw it as a potential tool in the creation of a “Jew-free workers’ state.” MNL OL K 149 BM Jobboldali összesítő [Right-wing Summaries]. Number 11,225. 423–26.

On the basis of the available sources we know that 40 work camps were in operation in Hungary between 1935 and 1939. Until the spring of 1937, the work camps, which were scattered across the country and were active for roughly one month in the summer, were under the supervision of the Work Camp Committee of the Turul Coalition, a committee which was created in 1934. In 1937, in large part because of the enthusiasm that had been created by their successes, the camps came under state oversight, specifically under the jurisdiction of the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education. The Voluntary Work Camp of University and College Students, which was organized by the ministry and which in general copied the goals and the methods of the Turul camps (and which in 1938 was renamed Voluntary Work Service of University and College Students, or EÖM, to use an acronym based on the Hungarian name), was in operation on the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom until the spring of 1944.<sup>29</sup>

There was substantial continuity between the Turul work camps and the Voluntary Work Service of University and College Students, not only in the ideas on which they were based but also in their organization of work, and the system itself was based on the models of work camps outside of Hungary. Sometime between the beginning of early June and late September, the university and college students, who enrolled voluntarily and in every case as a member of some fraternal society, would do three or four weeks of hard physical labor, usually road construction and repair, swamp draining, logging, soil work, the construction of dams and embankments, digging channels to provide proper drainage in villages, and repairs to buildings in public spaces, such as cemeteries and churches. At the same time, in the camps for men, which were overseen by retired officers, the nature of the work depended in part on the geographical conditions. They strove to perform tasks that would be useful for individual communities without, however, taking away the few modest job opportunities that existed for day-laborers and navvies. In some cases, in the name of “protecting the race,” a notion that was alloyed with the views of some tendencies of populist thought, they managed to transform the ideal of cooperation between “Christian intellectuals” and the peasantry into a reality.

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29 1937 decree number 4.400 of the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education. 1938 decree number 2.500 of the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education. 1939: II civil defense bill of the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education; 1939 decree number 3.100 of the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education. VKM; 1944 decree number 8.830 of the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education. EÖM stood for Egyetemi és Főiskolai Hallgatók Önkéntes Munkaszolgálat.

The Turul camps were not given names, but the camps organized by EÖM were given ancient Hungarian names or names that were regarded as illustrious. They were also given numbers, and by 1944, according to my estimate, they numbered over 100. In 1938, a leadership training course was launched in Tihany, which can be interpreted as a step in the direction of professionalization. The work was done in a remarkably rigid manner, according to some people, with an adherence to a kind of strictness borrowed from RAD. For instance, on the first day, during a ceremonial common pledge the participants also took an oath to the regent, Miklós Horthy. In the camps they lived in wooden barracks that could be easily disassembled or (more frequently) in military tents, depending on the local conditions. By the end of the decade, there were some amenities in the barracks.<sup>30</sup> The various slogans were a mix of ideology and task to be performed: “Labor Service–Country Building,” “Our goal is to help, our tool is the sport of work,” or “Omnipotent God! Give a task and give bread to every working Hungarian.”<sup>31</sup> In the case of women, the salutation “blessed work!” was used, which was expressive of the expectations regarding religious life in the camps. The routines of daily life in the camps over the course of the years took place within essentially similar frameworks.

### *Interconnections between Voluntary Work and Compulsory Labor Service*

Drawing inspiration and energy from the success of EÖM and adopting an old aspiration of university fraternal societies, Béla Imrédy, who was appointed prime minister in May 1938 and who pursued a German orientation by this time, soon saw the potentials of RAD.<sup>32</sup> Given the dearth of sources, we do not know precisely why Imrédy, who initially was known as a pro-British figure, was drawn to the institution, which, though present worldwide, in Hungary bore strong affinities with Nazi models. Whatever the reason, we do know that in

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30 For a summary, see András Szécsényi, “Egyetemi munkaszolgálat Magyarországon a Horthy-korszakban,” *Történelmi Múzeológiai Szemle* 10 (2011): 149–64.

31 MNL OL K 636 VKM box 704, batch 98. A Turul Szövetség általános ügyei 1932–1936. batch 98. Correspondence, 2.

32 Béla Imrédy (1891–1946) was an economist and banker, and he briefly served as prime minister (1938–1939). He is associated with the first Jewish law passed in Hungary. Following his forced resignation, he founded an extreme right wing, anti-Semitic party (the Party of Hungarian Revival), which became part of the government coalition in the spring of 1944, following the occupation of Hungary by the German army. He was sentenced to death and executed in 1946. On Imrédy, see: Péter Sipos, ed., *Imrédy Béla a vádoltak padján* (Budapest: Osiris–Budapest Főváros Levéltára, 1999).



1937, Tarnói Kostyál asked Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi in a memorandum to establish EÖM as quickly as possible and, drawing on the German model, to make it compulsory. Darányi had declined, but the document, which at the time also came into Imrédy's hands, may have been the first such writing that called Imrédy's attention to the issue.<sup>33</sup>

On May 2, 1938, in the last weeks of Darányi's tenure as prime minister, Imrédy, the heir apparent to his position as head of government, held a speech in parliament in which he described his vision for the country. He gave voice in this speech—and he was the first prominent figure in public life to do so—to the alleged necessity of labor service on a compulsory basis. According to Imrédy, the importance of social cohesion and unity, which were part of the ideals of the Turul Coalition and EÖM, clearly explained the need to make labor service obligatory, and he pledged to support and strengthen everything for which Miklós Kozma, who had been Minister of Interior from 1935 to 1937, had taken resolute though ultimately unsuccessful steps.

Kozma had been one of the most important proponents of the development on a large scale of the Turul labor service. He had also held the Nazi labor service institution in high esteem, and in December 1936, at the invitation of Wilhelm Frick, he had had occasion to observe the German labor service structures first hand. As Minister of Interior, Kozma had always endeavored to make the voluntary camps compulsory for university students, on the basis of the model of the RAD camps (even if he later denied this after having resigned from his position as minister).<sup>34</sup> After having been compelled to resign, he made the following remarks regarding his recollections:

Compulsory labor service is a powerful institution for the nurturing of the nation, and it bears not the slightest affinity with slavery. In the work camps, youths who have completed a college education live alongside the simple children of the people in the most comradely spirit and without regard for social differences, and this means a great deal both from the perspective of ethical rearing and discipline. I spent

33 László Tharnói [Kostyál], *Magyar munkaszolgálat. Munkatáborok a magyar nép és föld szolgálatában* (Budapest: Turul, 1939), 32–33.

34 MNL OL K 429 Kozma Miklós iratai [Papers of Miklós Kozma], microfilm box number 3,931: Kozma Miklós jelentése a RAD munkatáborairól, 1936. december [Miklós Kozma's Report on the RAD Work camps, December 1936], 45–50. For more on Kozma's role and his trip to Germany in a wider context, see András Szécsényi, "Kozma Miklós és a munkaszolgálat," *Modern Magyarország* 3, no. 1 (2014): 104–24, accessed October 13, 2015, [http://epa.oszk.hu/02300/02336/00003/pdf/EPA02336\\_moma\\_2014\\_kulonszam\\_104-124.pdf](http://epa.oszk.hu/02300/02336/00003/pdf/EPA02336_moma_2014_kulonszam_104-124.pdf).

time in places an hour and a half from Berlin, for instance, that were barren, submerged in water, and boggy. [...] The work camps are amazingly simple, but they are similarly clean, healthy, and tasteful. It never occurred to me, I said later, that labor service should be made compulsory in Hungary, instead I will attempt to come into contact with the youth groups and societies that have done voluntary work service, and I want to support them in this very useful and beneficial endeavor. [...] Naturally, one of the guiding principles is that this work should in no way create competition with the private economy.<sup>35</sup>

In his speech, Imrédy, alluding to international examples and the ideas of Kozma, made the following proclamation:

The unity of the Hungarian people means a fusion in thinking and in spirit. We must further this fusion with institutions that lead the individual layers of national society to love one another. For precisely this reason, one of the essential points of our program, a point that requires careful preparation, is the introduction of compulsory labor service... [noise, cries of approval and dissent] ...such that, within the framework of compulsory labor, the youthful intelligentsia comes to know the mentality of the youthful working class and agricultural laborers [noise, cries of approval and dissent] so that the handshake can take place that—I believe and I proclaim—will lead to mutual respect and, through this, unusual spiritual enrichment.<sup>36</sup>

On May 19, 1938, Imrédy raised the question at a meeting of the leaders of the Hungarian Telegraph Office with regards to preparations for the International Eucharistic Congress. He may have mentioned it because he had already decided to follow the German model and make labor service compulsory. Miklós Kozma wrote the following in his journal at the time:

Everyone has read Béla Imrédy's program. [...] When you read this program, you see clearly that no government in Hungary has ever dared come forward with such a right-wing program. Who in Hungary would have dared, even as recently as six months ago, to have thought of creating a national labor service? It is an old idea of mine that

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35 MNL OL K 429 Kozma Miklós iratai, microfilm box number 3,931. Adatgyűjtemény [Collection of Data] 1936–1940, 101.

36 *Az 1935. évi április hó 27-ére hirdetett Országgyűlés nyomtatványai. Képviselőházi Napló*, vol 18 (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1938), 604–05.



is dear to my heart. It could help us overcome a host of Hungarian transgressions and mistakes.<sup>37</sup>

In the second half of May 1938, Imrédy informed the Minister of Defense of his plans. The Minister of Defense ordered Béla Szinay, commander-in-chief of EÖM (and also a man who bore the title “vitéz,” an honorary title given in the Horthy era), to state his position with regards to the question immediately and to devise a plan for the possible introduction of the program.<sup>38</sup> On June 1, 1938, Szinay made the following report to the Minister of Defense:

In the near future, labor service in Hungary will become compulsory, and this makes it desirable for the aforementioned Supreme Command to inform itself with regards to the institution of compulsory labor service in Germany and Bulgaria (how many people are involved, how many camps are there, who is obliged to participate and for how long, who are the leaders and permanent commanders and who are the people in temporary leadership or command positions, what pay, provisions, clothing, and equipment is provided for the participants, what are the annual costs and what is the value of the work performed in a year, what kinds of advantages do the participants enjoy when seeking employment or with regards to taxes). I request that undersigned supreme command be provided with the organizational information enumerated above as quickly as possible by the foreign representatives in Germany and Bulgaria. I also note that the supreme command places emphasis on being provided information regarding the reorganization currently underway with regards to labor service in the former German–Austrian territories.<sup>39</sup>

Following this, the office of the prime minister better informed itself. On August 1, a conference was called at which ministerial advisor István Kultsár, the government commissioner for affairs involving the intelligentsia, reported on the things that had been accomplished by the labor service and the plans for the future. He also announced that the camps would gradually be made

37 MNL OL K 429, Kozma Miklós iratai, microfilm box number 3,933, 132.

38 He was also the staff captain of the so-called Vitéz Seat. “Vitéz Szinay Béla altábornagy vitézi törzskapitány: ‘nem halnak meg, örökké élnek, akik a hazáért halnak!’ [Vitéz Béla Szinay lieutenant general Vitéz staff captain: ‘One who fights for the homeland does not die, but lives forever!’]” *Hevesvármegye*, June 15, 1938, 2.

39 Hadtörténeti Intézet Levéltára (HIL). A Magyar egyetemi és Főiskolai Munkaszolgálat Főparancsnoksága. 1938 eln. B. osztály, 23269. 1–2. German–Austrian territories (*németosztrák területek*) referred to the territories of the inter-war Austrian state here.

compulsory.<sup>40</sup> In accordance with Szinay's request, the presidential division of the Ministry of Defense instructed the military attaché to Sofia to obtain information about the labor service institution in Bulgaria (the so-called *trudovaké*) and prepare a report for the head office of the Ministry of Defense, which indeed he submitted on August 9, 1938. The military attaché in Berlin was also instructed to submit a similar report. The German report was the book (in German) on the subject entitled *Arbeitsdienst*.<sup>41</sup> In the meantime, Dániel Fábry was entrusted with preparing a bill for the transformation of the labor service into a compulsory institution.

According to Fábry, the people who would be obliged to perform the work naturally would be recruited from a different social group, but the goal of promoting the notion of social responsibility would be the same as the fundamental goal of EÖM, namely “to ensure that workers who are performing physical labor and the workers who are engaged in intellectual undertakings be thoroughly mixed together and the blue-collar worker come to know and respect the labors of the white-collar worker, while the white-collar worker comes to respect the physical labor of the blue-collar worker.”<sup>42</sup>

Szinay prepared the plans with Kultsár, the ministerial advisor and government commissioner for unemployed white-collar workers. The plans made it quite clear that the same types of work were going to be performed in the new system. And as was the case with EÖM, it was considered important to ensure that the projects not exert a negative influence on the opportunities for the unemployed. Thus, road construction and drainage continued to dominate their thinking. On August 7, Szinay informed the press that the government's labor service program “has been completed.” In a few days they were going to present it to the public. He stated that, “[t]he new labor camp system builds on the structure of the existing system.”<sup>43</sup>

In what follows, I examine the establishment and evolution of compulsory labor service as an institution of civil defense only from the perspective of its relationship to the voluntary university work service. The 1939: II civil defense

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40 “Fokozatosan valósítják meg a kötelező munkaszolgálatot” [Gradually they are making compulsory labor service a reality], *Dunántúli Hírlap*, August 7, 1939, 5.

41 HIL A Magyar egyetemi és Főiskolai Munkaszolgálat Főparancsnoksága. 1938 eln. B. osztály, 23269., 3–10.

42 “Szombaton bevonult ötezer munkaszolgáló” [On Saturday, 5,000 labor service workers arrived], *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hírlap*, July 14, 1939, 7.

43 “Nagyarányú közmunkákat valósít meg a kormány a munkatábor-rendszer révén” [The government is completing ambitious public works projects with the work camp system], *Zalai Közöny*, August 7, 1938, 2.

bill established the legal foundation for the creation of the institution of labor service in the public interest within the framework of the Hungarian military.<sup>44</sup> Paragraph 230 a (1–6) of the law addresses the issue of the establishment of the institution of obligatory labor service in the public interest. According to the law, labor service programs had to be organized for men between the ages of 21 and 24 who were not suitable for military service and people whose citizenship was not regarded as clearly established (the first and second paragraphs).<sup>45</sup> The phrasing of the law concerned labor service that was military in nature and compulsory, but to be performed while living in work camps, and it furthermore targeted young people between the ages of 21 and 24, i.e. the average age of college and university students. If one takes into consideration the fact that the Turul labor service programs and the EÖM program had also had a decidedly military character, the connection between them is even more striking. In my view, however, the stipulations in the fifth paragraph were of the most gravity: “With the agreement of her legal guardian, a girl who is at least sixteen years of age and who has completed the fourth year of her secondary schooling or has an educational level of equal value can be enrolled in labor service in the public interest on a voluntary basis. The provisions of paragraphs (1)–(4) with deviations following from this paragraph apply to this case as well.” This statement essentially constituted the incorporation (or even the smuggling) of the university labor service program, now with a lower age limit (though admittedly not compulsory), into the civil defense law. This contention finds further support in a decree that was issued by General Fábry, who at the suggestion of the Ministry of Defense had been named by the Regent to serve under the Ministry of Defense of Károly Bartha as National Supervisor of the Public Interest Labor Service (Közérdekű Munkaszolgálat Országos Felügyelője, or KMOF).<sup>46</sup>

44 In the rest of this essay I refer to the institution as compulsory labor service or non-combatant labor service.

45 Originally, the parliamentary committee—again following the German model—wanted to include women in the compulsory labor service as well, but in the end they refrained from doing this. Indeed, initially the committee had not wanted to limit labor service to men between the ages of 21 and 24 and deemed suitable for service, but rather had wanted to broaden this group as well. MNL OL K2 Képviselőház és Nemzetgyűlés általános és elnöki iratai [General and presidential documents of the House of Representatives and the National Assembly]. Bundle 563, 123. A honvédelemről [On civil defense].

46 As of early 1939, the Ministry of Defense created a Labor Service and Labor Issues Group, which dealt with issues involving the public interest labor service and other workers’ formations that came under the oversight of the military. It was led by the KMOF. The KMOF had a voice in the restructuring of the university and college student associations, which had been under discussion since 1939. He informed the Ministry of Defense of his ideas. HIL I/116. Az ifjúság honvédelmi nevelésének és testnevelésének

Fábry had served as a spokesman for the Turul Labor Service in the Ministry of Defense,<sup>47</sup> and in 1937–1938 he had accepted a role in EÖM. According to the decree, youths who had taken part in the voluntary university work camps before May 17, 1939 could count the time they had spent there against the obligation to serve in the public interest labor service. Anyone who had done so after this date, however, could not.<sup>48</sup>

As it so happens, in 1937, as part of a continuing studies program in public administration, Fábry had already spoken on the close link between EÖM and a compulsory labor service envisioned for the future.<sup>49</sup> At a similar continuing studies program in public administration in 1938, Szinay built on Fábry's ideas. We have good reason to think that Szinay's plans were essentially identical with the ideas outlined in the report he sent to Prime Minister Béla Imrédy in May 1938. Like Fábry, Szinay emphatically called attention to the similarities between the mechanisms, functioning, and goals of the German RAD, the Turul Labor Service, EÖM, and the compulsory labor service program of the Hungarian military (which essentially was built on EÖM). Furthermore, he linked EÖM and the institution of non-combatant labor service with his contention that the two systems were essentially two branches of the "Hungarian National Labor Service." However, he felt that EÖM would soon cease operations: "With this, I have brought to a close the University and College Student Voluntary Labor Service, because it has been replaced by compulsory labor service."<sup>50</sup> (History, however, did not bear out his words.) Szinay then discussed his plan for compulsory labor service, which would involve an expansion year by year of the EÖM camp system (in 1939, some 4,000 people worked in the labor service programs, but by 1944 this number had grown to 44,000) without, however, any essential change to its structure and operations. The plan did not contain any anti-Semitic discriminatory measures.<sup>51</sup> In summary, the leaders of the two labor

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országos vezetője naplója [Journal of the national leader of civil defense training and physical education for youths], August 30, 1941; September 20, 1941.

47 "Munkatáborok Magyarországon" [Labor camps in Hungary], *Bajtárs*, January 14, 1938, 4.

48 Dr. Aurél Berezsnai, Tibor Fehér, and ifj. István Kostyál, eds., *Munkaszolgálatos kézikönyv* (Budapest: Magyar Cserkészek Gazdasági és Kiadó Szövetkezet, 1940), 12.

49 Dániel Fábry, *Munkaszolgálat* (Budapest: n.p., 1938), 1–22. This booklet specified six functions of compulsory labor, which overlapped in part with the functions of the volunteer systems: national defense, ethical rearing, and sanitation, economic, social, and military functions.

50 Szinay, *Magyar Nemzeti Munkaszolgálat*, 26.

51 In addition to the expansive presentation mentioned above (the text of which was published), the commander-in-chief of EÖM made two other reports in December 1939 for the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education in which he again examined the relationship between EÖM and the

service systems both gave similar, unambiguous, and persuasive descriptions of the clear relationship between the voluntary and the compulsory institutions of labor service.

The significance of the parallels between the two systems is also illustrated by the comments that were made in the course of a debate in parliament regarding a bill on civil defense. On December 7, 1938, Minister of Defense Károly Bartha introduced a bill which was sent to committee for review. On January 13, 1939, the committee for the armed forces, administration, the economy, transportation and justice submitted its report on the bill to parliament. The bill was modified in accordance with the report and first discussed in parliament on January 17. In the course of the debate, a total of 32 representatives voiced their opinions, only two of whom, the two Social Democrats, were in opposition to the bill. The governing party and the right-wing opposition celebrated the measure and only a few of them actually made observations bearing on the details of its contents. According to Sándor Ember, for instance:

We have already experimented with labor service in past decades. A small segment of the college youth tried to further the introduction of this institution in Hungary by organizing voluntary work camps, drawing on models from abroad. The attempts that were made in this sphere amply justified the expectations, and I must express my sincere appreciation and thanks to the Minister of Defense for having thought of this institution when preparing this bill.<sup>52</sup>

Ember continued, saying that the bill was in no way an obstacle to the voluntary university labor service programs, which he felt were fully justified given the endless public works projects that had been undertaken, which would have been inconceivable if entrusted simply to the private sector. Others emphasized the groundbreaking role of the Turul and the EÖM work camps, which had provided a kind of prototype for the introduction of compulsory military labor service. The Jewish laws (1938: XIV and the 1939: IV) provided a foundation for making labor service compulsory, and using these laws, the parliamentary majority agreed to allow the leaders and divisions of the Ministry

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compulsory labor service and made ascertainties that harmonized with the conclusions he had previously drawn. MNL OL K 636 VKM 898. box, 61. batch. Nemzeti Munkatáborok ügyei [Issues pertaining to the National Work Camps]. 1937–1941. Szinay Béla főparancsnok jelentése [Report of commander-in-chief Béla Szinay], 1939, 5–17.

52 *Képviseelőházi Napló*, January 20, 1939, vol. 21, 372–77.

of Defense to begin “the solution of the Jewish question in the army.” Thus the first step was taken in the legal prohibition from the armed services of the citizens of Hungary who were defined by the law as Jewish. It seems worth noting, however, that in the initial stages the law was directed against the Jews neither in its provisions nor in its implementation.

This is also indicated by the minutes of a meeting held in March 1939 by the Directorate of the General Staff (the Ministry of Defense, division 1/a). They resolved, in accordance with paragraphs 91 and 230 of the law, to pursue “certain work training” programs. The participants in the meeting saw labor service as a means of addressing the dearth of workers and skilled laborers by drafting people who were not suitable for military service. The proposed plan would have assigned these people, somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 in total, to three-month work projects (road construction, railroad work), while the skilled laborers among them would be given work in factories that required training. In the end, division 1/a called on division 10 to organize the statistics concerning the people regarded as unsuitable for military service by line of occupation and provide this information to the Supreme Civil Defense Council, which was to devise a plan that included precise regulations of the two labor services and send it to division 1/a.<sup>53</sup>

In the course of a meeting of the General Staff on April 24, the participants discussed the concrete steps that were to be taken to achieve the public interest labor service’s large scale development on the basis of the proposal of the prime minister’s office. People fulfilling their compulsory labor service obligations were required to do three months of “public interest labor service.” Following two weeks of preparatory training, males between the ages of 14 and 42 and females between the ages of 16 and 42 could be called up for service. The people responsible for the plans anticipated providing training for 6,000 skilled laborers and 14,000 workers within one year. In the event of war, these numbers could jump to 75,000 and 250,000, in which case one to three weeks of training was to be provided and, as was already the case, males between the ages of 14 and 42 and women between the ages of 16 and 42 could be called up for service. The workers, who lived in camps and were parts of squadrons that functioned under the authority of KMOF (which itself was under the Ministry of Defense), were given uniforms and, like the student workers of EÖM, 200 fillérs per day

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53 HIL Vezérkari Főnökség [Directorate of the General Staff], 1939. 1/a. 3415/elnöki o. [presidential division], 519–22, 277/1237–1256. microfilm, the regulation of labor service [no page number given].



as pay. The cost of establishing the system was estimated at 2,200,000 pengő and the first round of conscriptions was planned for July 1 and October 1, 1939.<sup>54</sup>

As a consequence of the council, the Ministry of Defense drew up decree 5070/1939. ME, which established the general principles and organization of the labor service.<sup>55</sup> On July 1, 1939, the Presidential Division of the Ministry of Defense gave instructions according to which a meeting was to be held on July 13 under the chairmanship of General Fábry at which, at the request of the Ministry of Defense, the leaders of the relevant Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Education divisions would be present. The meeting was held and the representative of the Presidential Division had the impression that the institution was “still fighting with initial difficulties.” According to Fábry,

the people who perform public interest labor service will be those who have accepted this as their task or are pleased to learn that they do not have to do military service. If the equipment, accommodation, provisions, etc. provided for these individuals do not meet the desired standard, then we will have done more to harm the initiative than to promote it, and we will have awoken antagonistic sentiments in these people with regards to the army. The question of equipment, accommodation and provisions leaves a great deal to be desired.<sup>56</sup>

At the meeting that was held on July 13, however, the decision was reached to have the first shift begin on July 1.<sup>57</sup> The presidential division employed retired officers and EÖM officers to do the organizational work.

The contemporary print media reported on the connections between the two labor service systems very much in the spirit of what I have discussed above. This view found expression frequently in the press on the local and

54 HIL Vezérkari Főnökség, 1939. 1/a. 21488/elnöki o. 1–4. Deliberations on compulsory labor service; HIL Vezérkari Főnökség, 1939. 1/a. 3959/elnöki o. 1–18. Deliberations on compulsory labor service [no page number given].

55 Foreign Ministry decree number 5070/1839 on the regulation of labor service in the public interest (May 12, 1939). This decree, the previous plan, and the minutes of the meeting of the council of ministers are cited in Karsai, “Fegyvertelen,” 64–71.

56 HIL Vezérkari Főnökség 1939. 1.a. 4038/elnöki o., 277/1305–1328. microfilm. Meeting on the subject of labor service in the public interest, 1–4.

57 Ibid. and HIL Vezérkari Főnökség 1939. 1.a. 4003/elnöki o., 277/1305–1328. microfilm. Meeting on the subject of labor service in the public interest. 1–4.; HIL Vezérkari Főnökség 1939. 1. 4070/elnöki o., 277/1305–1328. microfilm. 1–5. Meeting on the subject of labor service in the public interest; HIL Vezérkari Főnökség 1939. 1. 4109/elnöki o., 277/1305–1328. microfilm. Meeting on the subject of labor service in the public interest, 1–5.

national levels, regardless of the political orientation of the publication. It is also worth noting contentions made by László Tarnói Kostyál in his book *Magyar munkaszolgálat* [Hungarian Labor Service], which was published in the spring of 1939. Tarnói Kostyál, who at the time was already active in the National Socialist movement, regarded the Turul labor service, the EÖM camps, and the compulsory military labor service as essentially the same. He unambiguously asserted that the institution of compulsory labor service had grown out of the other two systems and essentially represented their logical extension through the creation of an institution that could become the site of joyous communal social life. It is true that he did not regard Imrédy's organization as suitable and thought that it should be transformed in its ideology and its structure to correspond more closely to the RAD model. In the book, he presented his detailed and sometimes rather fantastic visions regarding this transformation.<sup>58</sup>

A book entitled *Munkaszolgálatos kézikönyv* [Labor Service Handbook], which was published in 1940, likened both EÖM and the system of compulsory labor service to standard military training, and in doing so elevated the value of the labor service camp. The publication reveals that even in the legally and politically new situation, the work camps were not substantially different from the EÖM camps:

according to the executive decree regarding the public interest labor service, the work camp is a workers unit that is organized along military lines; the framework of the labor service obligation. The camp (barracks, tents, etc.) is home to the battalion. Everyday life begins and ends here. Reveille at dawn (roughly 5:00 AM). Suddenly rest and peace are transformed into the pulsing circulation of the blood. After the participants have done their morning exercises, washed, cleaned the area, and cleaned their living quarters, they will find a fresh, hot breakfast steaming in a mess tin. The squadron soon lines up and departs for the work site. The Sun has hardly begun to rise and their muscles are already bulging. The road is being built! The work is at a boil! Hours fly by and soon it is noon. The squadrons return to the areas around their barracks one by one. This is followed by reporting to the commander. Soon the sound of the horn can be heard calling everyone to lunch. Then one or two hours of rest, followed by a dip. Following the short work shift in the afternoon, military training or discipline drills, then a presentation on national defense. Orders are issued and the ill or ailing are examined. Then a period of leisure

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58 Tarnói, *Magyar munkaszolgálat*, 1–64.



time begins, which lasts until dinner, or rather until taps. Everyone spends this time as he pleases. You can rest, work, write letters, or have fun. This is how the day is broken up in the work camp. Sundays and holidays, naturally, do not follow the same tempo as weekdays. The piety of the church service in the camps, the great peace and liberating calm, and the songs that rise forth from beside the red flames of the campfire create an unforgettable array of variation. [...] The days spent doing difficult, strenuous work are also full of good cheer, joy, and unforgettable experiences. Camp life is the healthiest life for a man.<sup>59</sup>

Until 1941, the year in which Hungary entered the war, EÖM and the system of compulsory labor service essentially satisfied the same demand.<sup>60</sup> This was not changed by the creation of voluntary military labor service for females, in accordance with which, as of December of 1940, females above the age of 16 were given work on a voluntary basis in arms factories.<sup>61</sup> In the initial phases, the two institutions were even sometimes mixed up by the press.<sup>62</sup>

On July 15 and September 20, 1939, the first battalions of people working as part of the compulsory labor service were established in ten settlements (including Zamárdi and Hódmezővásárhely).<sup>63</sup> The operation of the battalions was regulated by decree number 5070/1939 ME, which was issued in accordance with paragraph 230 of the law, and the battalions were placed under the oversight of the authorized army corps headquarters.<sup>64</sup> On June 27, Minister of Defense Bartha reaffirmed his earlier assertions and informed the army commanders of the following: “[i]ts goal in general is to ensure rearing in the national spirit and

59 *Munkaszolgálatos kézikönyv*, 116–17.

60 From then on, every year in the second half of August institutions of higher education had to inform pupils who fell within the age limits set by the Ministry of Defense in its instructions of their obligation to enlist. In other words, in 1939 they had to inform pupils who had been born in 1919 of their obligation to do labor service and in 1944 they had to inform pupils who had been born in 1923 of their obligation. The lists of people who were called on to enroll are usually missing from the university archives or are fragmentary. The most complete lists are found in the Library and Archive of the School of Theology at Péter Pázmány University (PPTÉ HK HL). Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem, Hittudományi Kar, Dékáni Hivatal iratai, box 66–67.

61 1940 decree number 6,570. ME on establishment of executive measures connected with the organization of women's volunteer work in civil defense (December 15, 1940); the 1940 decree number 1,080. ME on the organization of women's volunteer work in civil defense.

62 “A Közérdekű Önkéntes Munkaszolgálat ünnepélyesen megkezdte a munkát,” *Magyar Újság Képes Melléklete*, August 6, 1939, 2.

63 HIL Vezérkari Főnökség, 1939, 32 487/elnöki osztály. 10., 4. Közérdekű munkaszolgálatra való behívás [Conscription into labor service in the public interest].

64 The structure of a battalion was similar to the model in the German RAD, which had territorial units and battalion units.

also to complete training and work that is in the public interest and is of public use. From the perspective of the army, it ensures the training of Hungarian workers and labor formations.”<sup>65</sup> It applied to youths between 21 and 24 years of age who had been declared unfit for military service, some 6,000 people in total.

The first group began work on August 1 in Balatonzamárdi and Makó “amidst celebratory circumstances,” with cries of “to work!” These two battalions did public use projects (swamp drainage and the creation of embankments in order to transform the area into fertile land).<sup>66</sup> The other seven did national defense work (they were made into a munitions industry squadron and got training and work at the facilities). It is quite clear that the division of labor was identical to the tasks assigned by EÖM, and indeed this is hardly surprising, since EÖM had organized the first public interest labor service battalions.<sup>67</sup> (Béla Szinay had made the work that was done on the Zamárdi swamp part of his plans for work in 1937, at the urging of the local town clerk).<sup>68</sup>

The fact that Tarnói Kostyál became the editor-in-chief of *Tábori Élet* [Camp Life], the newspaper of the IX. public interest labor service battalion, also indicates the interconnections between EÖM and the public interest labor service. He was clearly given this position so that the Hungarian army would be able to use his four years of experience.<sup>69</sup> The newspaper of the IV. camp battalion of Szigetvár, *Tábori Újság* [Camp News], borrowed its slogan (“Labor Service–Country Building”) from EÖM. The views of Lieutenant János Haidekker, found in the pages of *Tábori Újság*, also reveal this continuity:

The young people do this admittedly hard physical work with enthusiasm, which is even more amazing if one takes into consideration that they were deemed not suitable for military service, thus they have some kind of physical handicap or ailment. But they were not born to

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65 HIL Vezérkari Főnökség, 1939, 4167/elnöki osztály, 95 045. sz., 1. Közérdekű munkaszolgálat megindulása [The launch of labor service in the public interest].

66 “Az első kötelező munkaszolgálat a Balatonnál” [The first compulsory labor service on Lake Balaton], *Baltoni Kurír*, July 27, 1939, 2; “Az első kötelező munkaszolgálat Somogyban” [The first compulsory labor service in Somogy], *Somogyi Újság*, July 29, 1939, 1.

67 HIL A M. Kir. Honvédelmi Minisztérium 1939. működése. Jelentés [The functioning of the Hungarian Ministry of Defense in 1939. Report]. HM 1940 elnöki o. I. tétel, 49343, 90–124.

68 [No author given], [no title], *Baltoni Kurír*, June 9, 1937, 6.

69 This publication [OSzK H 62.742] and the other issues of *Tábori Újság* can only be found in the National Széchényi Library, and not in their entirety. In what follows I indicate the issues to which I am referring.

a Hungarian mother to fear rising early or doing hard work, digging the soil with pick and shovel. [...] The labor service program is in good hands, the boys are doing good work, work the fruits of which they too will someday gather, because work done under strict, military conditions will have a beneficial influence on their dispositions and physical development as well.<sup>70</sup>

In 1940, the metaphor of building the country, i.e. the use of the EÖM slogan among people doing compulsory labor service, remained a popular turn of phrase. In the spring of 1940, one finds the following comments of an officer in the pages of *Tábori Újság*, a periodical (copies of which were made using a typewriter) of the V. battalion, which was centered in the city of Técső (today Tyachiv in the Ukraine):

and you, worker in the labor service program, who imagined yourself to be a person without worth, you see that you are as useful a citizen of your country as anyone. You donned your uniform, took an oath, you live a life of discipline, in a word, you are a soldier. A useful, working soldier of your poor country. Do not think there is a difference between you and your armed comrades! There isn't! One builds a country, the other defends his homeland by armed force. No one can say which is more important.<sup>71</sup>

The similarly entitled periodical of the VII. public interest labor service battalion of Makó, which in 1939 and 1940 was edited and written by army officers and workers in labor service, clearly adopted the goals of EÖM:

And now the youth of the city and the youth of the village live side by side in a big family. We do service and work in different capacities, but with the same faith and dedication. We strive to understand and respect one another's values, so that when we return to civilian life we can be the workers and the soldiers of the emergence of a social mentality that will be more harmonious than the mentality of today and have a strong sense of the feeling of unity.<sup>72</sup>

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70 János Haidekker, "A legújabb magyar honvédsereg" [The newest Hungarian army], *Tábori Újság*, 4–5/1939, 1. [OSzK H 20.673.].

71 József Beinschrott, "Egy év után...!" [One year later...!], *Tábori Újság*, 3/1940, 1. [OSzK H 20.674.].

72 István Schneider, "A munkaszolgálat" [The labor service], *Tábori Újság*, 1939, [no page number given].

In July 1940, Tarnói Kostyál made one more attempt to become an important figure in the labor service institution. He submitted a request to KMOF for permission to produce a public interest labor service newspaper, and he asked that he be entrusted with the task of editing it. The competent divisions of the Ministry of Defense discussed the question and at first held out the promise of support. Tarnói buttressed his request with the observation that he was working as a newspaper writer and indeed as the editor of the newspaper of one of the battalions and also as a jurist, and furthermore he had made significant contributions to the very emergence of the labor service institution (and with this contention he made explicit the parallel between the Turul labor service and compulsory public interest labor service):

With this periodical I wish to further the cause of labor service in Hungary with the weapons of the mind so that the thousands of workers, who are performing compulsory labor for the good of the homeland, will not regard their most solemn duty as a cold obligation, but rather will be made aware of the popularity of the work they are doing, and the leaders themselves will be genuinely enthusiastic about labor service.<sup>73</sup>

Tarnói Kostyál was willing to invest 5,000 pengős of his own money in the newspaper. According to his plans, the monthly would have been published by KMOF. However, in October the chairmanship of the Ministry of Defense and KMOF changed its mind, as the idea had come up of using labor service in the future to put people classified legally as Jews (and therefore not permitted to join the armed services) to work. Given this, they felt that reports of the labor service in the press “would not be timely [...] under the present circumstances.”<sup>74</sup>

The situation worsened as EÖM strove with increasing resolve to distance itself from the system of public interest (and non-combatant) labor service for Jews. According to a report submitted in May 1943 by form master for physical education and sports Román Táruczay-Felicides, “[t]he term labor service is an offense to the dignity of the university youths, because they understand the term to refer to Jewish labor service. A new name must be found [instead of EÖM], because with this name neither the voluntary labor service for university youth nor anything similar will work effectively. With regards to university labor service

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73 HIL 1940 elnöki. o. II. tétel, 36531. Munkaszolgálatos folyóirat megindítása [The launch of a labor service periodical], 1–9.

74 Ibid.

for females, a meeting must urgently be held.”<sup>75</sup> No new name was ever devised, in all likelihood because by that time EÖM and the leadership of the system of compulsory labor service had already embarked down radically different paths.

Thus I am not contending that the system of voluntary labor for university students and youths of that age was a direct precursor to the system of labor service that was established by the 1939 bill on civil defense (a system which, as of the summer of 1940 and particularly following the active engagement of the country in the war, was used quite directly against the Jewish citizenry of the country, in part as a consequence of the shift to the right in the country’s political orientation). I am contending, however, that it provided a clear prototype.

It is worth considering this question in a broader context. As of the mid-1930s, new kinds of extreme right-wing parties and movements began to appear in Hungary, first and foremost under the influence of Nazi Germany. By the end of the decade, they had become a political force to be reckoned with, and in the parliamentary elections of 1939 they were the largest oppositional force. While the parties differed from one another in numerous details regarding their ideals, their ideologies all shared one important feature: they were all anti-Semitic.<sup>76</sup> As early as 1937, Prime Minister Darányi had to face the fact that if he wished his party, the Party of National Unity, to remain in power he had to take measures to appease the increasingly significant body of anti-Semitic voters. As a consequence of the territorial revision that took place in 1938–41, largely under the auspices of Hitler, subsequent governments played the “Jewish card.” The first Jewish law, which was drafted by Darányi and accepted by parliament under Imrédy, only exacerbated this, as did the second Jewish law, passed during the tenure of Prime Minister Pál Teleki. This was followed during the war years by more racially motivated measures similar to the Nuremberg laws. These laws put an end to the equality of Hungarian citizens who were defined as Jews by the law and deprived tens of thousands of Hungarian citizens of their livelihoods.<sup>77</sup>

The institution of labor service became one of the sites of the racial war against the Jews of Hungary who had been reduced to the status of second-class citizens. Labor service gradually underwent a transformation from the military

75 HIL I/116. Az ifjúság honvédelmi nevelésének és testnevelésének országos vezetője naplója, May 18, 1943, 3.

76 See Rudolf Paksa, *Magyar nemzetiszocialisták: Az 1930-as évek új szélsőjobboldali mozgalma, pártjai, politikusai, sajtója* (Budapest: MTA BTK TTI–Osiris, 2013).

77 For a recent inquiry, which adopts a critical perspective, see Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege: Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon* (Budapest: Jelenkor, 2013).

policy understanding of the institution as providing peaceful physical work for Christian citizens who had been deemed unsuitable for the armed services to a compulsory form of service. The elites of the Hungarian military leadership were deeply anti-Semitic. A transcript of pro-Nazi chief of staff Henrik Werth from April 18, 1940 contains unambiguously anti-Semitic goals: “independent of the political line, the Jewish question must be resolved administratively within the army, radically and urgently.”<sup>78</sup> Werth also said that Jews should be used in the armed services in places where the losses would be the greatest. His statements concern efforts he had soon managed to effectuate: “a person determined to be Jewish cannot be granted any of the advantages given to members of the military, nor can a Jew be a reserve officer, a junior officer, or a non-commissioned officer.”<sup>79</sup>

In the autumn of 1940, the institution of labor service began to undergo a permanent change when the Ministry of Defense realized that it could easily use male citizens who had now been defined as Jewish by law as a work force in the labor service for military purposes. A male between the ages of 18 and 42 and defined under law at the time as Jewish was obliged to enlist in the non-combatant labor service instead of doing service in the armed forces. The inmates worked in labor camps. Initially Jewish inmates wore an armband bearing the national colors, but later they were obliged to wear a yellow armband (in the case of Hungarian citizens who had been baptized but were nonetheless regarded as Jewish by law, the armband was white).

There were three types of squadron: 1. Camp squadrons (which were mixed): Jews who were regarded as reliable. 2. Special work squadrons: Jews whose loyalty was suspected and who were regarded as unreliable. 3. Work squadrons consisting of members of national minorities. While the total number of inmates ranged from 10,000 to 20,000 between 1939 and 1943, by 1944 it had risen to 63,000. According to available sources, on July 17, 1940 there were 60 special (Jewish) workers squadrons. The military leadership planned to raise the number of inmates (in a short period of time) to 90,000 or 100,000. As a consequence of the regulations passed on August 1940, Jews who were regarded as capable

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78 Braham, *Népiertás*, 297. Henrik Werth (1881–1952) was an officer of the Hungarian General Staff of German descent. From 1938 to September 1941, he was the head of the Hungarian General Staff. He was known for his ties to the National Socialists and for his pronounced anti-communism. He was one of the most prominent supporters of Hungary’s entry into the war on Germany’s side and against the Soviet Union. He was convicted of war crimes in 1948, and he died in 1952 in Soviet captivity. Lóránd Dombrády, *Werth Henrik: Akiről nem beszélünk* (Budapest: Argumentum, 2005).

79 Ibid.

of working were enlisted in camp worker squadrons, while elderly Jews and Jews in poor health were enlisted in squadrons that did non-combatant work within the borders of country. In both cases, the enlistment was for a period of three months.

The Directorate of the General Staff drew up many different plans the essential goal of which was the “radical de-Jewification” of the Hungarian armed forces. They made statutory provisions for people who were regarded as politically unreliable or not suitable for recruitment into the armed forces for health reasons and for members of national minorities. Following Hungary’s entry into the war, a series of discriminatory legal measures were taken that made the everyday lives of the compulsory labor camp inmates increasingly difficult. People did labor service in the hinterland, beyond the borders of the country, in the theater of military operations, and even on the front. The regulation concerning compulsory military service for Jews was announced in July 1942 (statute 1942: XIV). According to the law, Jews could not be members of the so-called Levente (a paramilitary organization roughly comparable with the Hitlerjugend) or join the armed forces, but could only do “non-combatant service,” which “is not worthy of a Hungarian man or youths who have grown up in Christian thinking.”<sup>80</sup> This phrasing clearly shows that, in comparison with its initial phases, compulsory labor service had undergone a fundamental change, and its ties to EÖM, both with regards to its ideals and its function, had been broken.

### *Conclusion*

The history of voluntary labor service and compulsory labor service split in 1941. The history of public interest and non-combatant labor service is closely intertwined with Hungary’s acceptance of an active role in World War II. Tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews served as inmates of the compulsory (or forced) labor camps, and this represents a significant aspect of the Holocaust in Hungary. With regards to the history of labor service in its different forms, as I noted at the beginning of this essay, since the 1960s research on the subject has been underway, but one could hardly claim that it has come close to exhausting

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80 On the labor service in Bor, see Tamás Csapody, *Bori munkaszolgáltatások* (Budapest: Vince, 2012). The book also constitutes a fine handbook on the secondary literature on the labor service in Bor. On the labor service in the western part of the country in 1944 and 1945, see Szabolcs Szita, *Holocaust az Alpok előtt* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1983) and Szabolcs Szita, *Birodalmi védőállás*.



the topic. The causes for this include an aversion to the use of new kinds of sources (for instance material sources) and a similar aversion to interdisciplinary methodologies, as well as the frustrating dearth of sources. The central documents of the public interest labor service were incinerated in 1944.<sup>81</sup> It is also slightly problematic that the research projects and the works that have been published tend to narrate the events from the perspective of political history, i.e. the “perspective of the perpetrators.” Questions regarding motivations on the micro-historical level or from the perspectives of social history or the history of mentalities have thus been rarely raised.<sup>82</sup>

The history and operations of EÖM after 1941 have been given scant attention at best. The dearth of sources is even more striking and there is virtually no secondary literature on the subject. We do know, however, that during the war the camp system grew, first and foremost in the Székely Land and in the southern parts of the country (a territory overlapping but not entirely congruent with Vojvodina), where the role of men was—in a significant digression from earlier practice—restricted to non-combatant civil defense work (such as digging anti-tank ditches). The roles that were assigned to women who were doing labor service remained essentially unchanged. Labor service camps were established not far from the Székely settlements in Vojvodina in Ófutas (today Futog in Serbia), Hadiknépe (today Sirig in Serbia), Horthyvára (today Stepanovićevo in Serbia), and Hadikföldje (today Temerin-Đurđevo in Serbia) and special camps were set up in Temerin and Szabadka (today Subotica in Serbia). In these special camps “red polka-dotted maidens” collectively took part in the harvest work, together with the female voluntary civil defense labor service and the members of the local Levente.<sup>83</sup>

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81 For instance, since the 1990s not a single scholar has thoroughly and systematically researched and analyzed the interviews that were done by the SHOAH Visual Foundation and compared them with the primary sources.

82 Gábor Gyáni is justified in his criticism of this state of affairs: Gábor Gyáni, “Helyünk a holokauszt történetírásában,” *Kommentár* 3, no. 3 (2008): 21. For a good counter example, see Heléna Huhák, “Lapátos hadsereg. Munkaszolgálat Magyarországon a II. világháborúban. Virtuális kiállítás,” accessed June 2, 2015, <http://musz.hdke.hu/> and Heléna Huhák, “A magyarországi munkaszolgálat múzeumi forrásai és kiállítási reprezentációjuk,” *Történeti Múzeológiai Szemle* 14 (2015) (forthcoming).

83 “Az ifjúság az új magyar kenyér szolgálatában” [The youth in the service of the new Hungarian bread], *Délvidék*, July 14, 1942, 4; “Piros pettyes lányok működnek a székely telepeken” [Red polka-dotted maidens at work in the Székely settlements], *Délvidék*, August 21, 1942, 6; “Aratnak a leventék. Az ifjúság az új kenyér szolgálatában” [The Levente are harvesting. Youth in the service of the new bread], *Délvidéki Magyarország*, July 11, 1942, 5; “Szabadkán is megszervezik a női önkéntes honvédelmi munkaszolgálatot” [Women’s Voluntary Civil Defense Labor Service is being organized in Szabadka as well], *Délvidéki*



Following Hungary's entry into the war, EÖM continued its operations without interruption or shift of direction. No changes took place in the leadership or in the work that was performed. As was the case with regards to the Hungarian army, however, the rules regarding EÖM underwent two changes. First, the internal regulations concerning voluntary labor service became more strict (more military in nature). Second, as of 1941 the rules concerning eligibility changed and the group of youths who could participate grew. Any student 16 years of age or older who had completed grammar school or at least the second year of middle school and who could demonstrate appropriate progress in studies and in religious ethics was allowed to enlist.

The fate of EÖM in Hungary was sealed by the occupation of the country by the German army in 1944. Though we do not know exactly why, the government under Döme Sztójay saw no reason to maintain the system, presumably in part because of the decline in the quantity and quality of the work performed and the drastically diminished number of people actually engaged in the program.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, the Student Civil Defense Labor Service (Diákok Honvédelmi Munkaszolgálat, DHM), which was created in its place in April 1944 (in a building in Klotild Street, which had served as the seat of EÖM), bore some resemblance to EÖM. One might say it was a kind of closing chord, imbued with a simplified and more right-wing rhetoric.

The complex history of the university voluntary labor service is relevant not only to the social history and history of the youth of the Horthy era. While I may have been able, in the modest framework of this essay, to cover only a few of the most important moments in this history, I have placed existing narratives about the evolution of the institution of compulsory labor in Hungary during World War II in a new, larger context. The comparative examination of the two systems offers a foundation for new conclusions and thereby enriches the secondary literature on the history of the Holocaust.

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*Magyarország*, July 8, 1942, 4; "Pirospettyes leány súlyos balesete Temerinben" [Serious accident involving a red polka-dotted maiden in Temerin], *Reggeli Újság*, August 1, 1941, 3.

84 1944 decree number 8,830. VKM az Egyetemi és Főiskolai Hallgatók Önkéntes Nemzeti Munkaszolgálatának megszüntetéséről [On the termination of the University and College Student Voluntary National Labor Service].

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