



fred bleakley &lt;fredbleak270@gmail.com&gt;

**(no subject)**

1 message

**fred bleakley** <fredbleak270@gmail.com>  
To: fred bleakley <fredbleak270@gmail.com>

Mon, Oct 3, 2022 at 6:36 PM

**INTRODUCTION TO AUSCHWITZ PROTOCOLS. CESLAV MORDOWICZ AND THE RACE TO SAVE HUNGARY;S JEWS**

On June 6, 1944, while the Allies were storming Normandy, thousands of Jewish men, women, and children from Hungary stumbled from cramped cattle car trains arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. At the same time, two escapees from Auschwitz, Czeslaw (Ceslav)<sup>1</sup> Mordowicz, a twenty-four-year-old Polish Jew, and Arnost Rosin, a twenty-nine-year-old Slovakian Jew, were telling the local branch of the Bratislava Jewish Central Council (JCC) about the concentration camp. Beginning on May 15, they had seen, firsthand, the camp's daily arrival of up to 12,000 Hungarian Jews. The arriving deportees had endured days of stifling heat, a lack of water, and, in each car, one overflowing bucket of human waste. They lined up as they got off the trains, with German shepherd dogs howling at them, where a uniformed SS physician flipped his thumb right or left. The lucky few moved to the right, fit for labor. The others would soon be lying dead inside the camp's gas chambers. As one historian put it, the Hungarian Holocaust was "the most concentrated and methodical deportation and massacre program of the war, a slaughter machine that functioned, perfectly oiled, for forty-six days on end."<sup>2</sup>

The mass deportations of Hungary's remaining Jews ended on July 6 on the order of Hungary's leader Miklós Horthy. Just hours later they would have been rounded up from the center of Budapest for deportation to Auschwitz.<sup>3,4</sup> Ceslav Mordowicz played a catalytic role in making that happen. This is Mordowicz's story: from the start of the war, his life in the ghetto, and his year and a half in Auschwitz, to his harrowing escape and cunning ways of avoiding recapture until he was finally caught, only to be deported in a nightmarish return to Auschwitz. This is also the story of Mordowicz's determination to tell of the horrors of Auschwitz. By doing so, his and his partner's testimony corroborated the gruesome reports of two prior Auschwitz successful escapes, that of Walter Rosenberg (Rudolf Vrba) and Alfred "Fredo" Wetzler on April 7, 1944, and that of Jerzy Tabeau, known as the "Polish Major," six months earlier. Those previous escapees had not been taken seriously until then by the officials who could make a difference. Together, the accounts of those three escapees have become the now famous Auschwitz Protocols, released by the US War Refugee Board to widespread press coverage in late 1944 and used by the prosecution in the postwar Nuremberg war trials of Nazi leaders.

In the decades following the war, historians and documentary filmmakers have focused largely on the Vrba/Wetzler report for the international pressure on Horthy to protect Hungary's remaining Jews. The importance of the Vrba/Wetzler report, as well as that of the "Polish Major" Tabeau, is irrefutable. However, the significance of the Mordowicz/Rosin Auschwitz report in corroborating and drawing further attention to those two reports has not been sufficiently recognized. A major reason stems from misstatements in the introduction of the Auschwitz

Protocols. The misstatements by the War Refugee Board (WRB) are detailed in the coda of this book. In contrast, my research shows that the Mordowicz/Rosin report gave religious and Allied officials more reason to see the truth of Auschwitz and put pressure on Horthy to save his country's remaining Jews.

I first heard of Ceslav in 1995, after Union College history professor Stephen Berk gave a lecture at a synagogue in Toronto. He cited Ceslav as an "unsung hero" of the war, adding that it wasn't known whether he was still alive. Hearing this, a woman in the audience rose and pointed to the man sitting beside her, saying, "Ceslav is right here!" A few months later, he received an honorary degree at Union College's graduation ceremony. As a writer at the Wall Street Journal, I attended the ceremony on a Sunday in June of that year to hear Union's president, Roger H. Hull, announce that Mordowicz "was one of four brave Jews. The news you and your fellow escapees brought helped alert the world to the horrors of the Nazi death camps." My short article on Mordowicz, published in the Journal the following week, led to the US Holocaust Museum interviewing Mordowicz for its archive of oral histories.<sup>5</sup> That article also put me on the road to writing this book. The sheer drama of the race to save the last Jews of Hungary captured my interest. Ceslav's story could not be told without the background of Hungary's on-again, off-again embrace of its Jewish population. I knew I needed to give the story "sweep and scope," as one of my former editors, John Lee of the New York Times, once stressed. But my day job and family came first. So I stored away all my interviews with Ceslav from 1995 to 1997 and waited until retirement several years ago to pursue the broader context of Ceslav's story.<sup>6</sup>

There have been several versions of this dramatic period written by Holocaust historians, most of them compiled decades after the war and delivered in an academic style. Many of these accounts differ on or leave vague the steps that led to Horthy's decision. The questions about the timing of Horthy's knowledge of the Holocaust and the Hungarian administration's role in the deportations remain a hot debate, fueled by the current regime and its supporters to minimize Hungarian responsibility. My challenge was to read the literature, sift through the inconsistencies, delve into archives, and conduct interviews to render a reasonable account of the Hungarian Holocaust and the role Ceslav Mordowicz had in helping to save the Jews of Budapest.

Would the Vrba/Wetzler report have garnered the attention it deserved without the corroboration of Ceslav and Arnost's report? Was Ceslav Mordowicz, the leader of his escape with Rosin, just a bit player in Horthy's momentous decision? Had Professor Berk overreached when he referred to Mordowicz as an unsung hero? I did not come away with conclusive, cause-and-effect evidence that the Mordowicz/Rosin report prompted the appeals to Horthy by religious and political leaders. But it was obvious that the connection and chronology of the events preceded the order to end deportations.

I took some liberties in telling this story as a narrative nonfiction, rather than as a strictly historical account. But I did not alter, nor purposely omit, important facts. I also had a point to make in writing this book. A catalyst, which I believe Ceslav was in this case, can be the missing link essential to the outcome of a significant event. But catalysts are often overshadowed. I didn't want Ceslav to be forgotten or remembered only as a footnote in this remarkable chapter of history.