

Chaim Goldberg: Hungarian Group Would Have Made Hitler Proud

I've been to Holocaust memorial centers and museums around the world, from West Bloomfield, Mich., to Jerusalem. But by far the most powerful exhibit I ever saw at any of these important institutions was one on "propaganda" at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

As a Jew, I've been taught about the Holocaust my entire life. But it took my brain years to figure out how something like this could have happened. I just couldn't grasp what the chain of events was that led to 6 million of my family members being massacred. How did Hitler pull this off?

The exhibit on propaganda helped me so much in my understanding. One thing I never put together was that the Holocaust began just after the Great Depression—the worst economic collapse in world history. This was prime material for Hitler's propaganda machine.

Slowly and methodically, Hitler and Joseph Goebbels began linking the Jews and the Great Depression. "It was the Jews who caused this." "Those greedy Jews are to blame." "All your suffering is because of the Jews." "If you don't have a job or a home or food for your family ... be angry at those money-loving Jews!"

This was the foundation being laid by the Nazis. They had to soften up the ground, to begin planting the seeds of hatred against the Jews. As the economy worsened and the people of Europe looked for someone to blame, more and more joined this Nazi chorus: "Blame the Jews." Thus the march toward the Holocaust was well underway.

Images from the propaganda exhibit came flooding in to my mind as I watched, in horror, a rally held in Hungary this past weekend. Hungary ... where hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

The following news excerpts describe what took place:

On the eve of Sunday's World Jewish Congress (WJC) meeting in Budapest, Hungary's capital, the country's far-right Jobbik party held an anti-Semitic demonstration, with one prominent member saying, "Hungary has been subjugated by Zionism."

Several hundred nationalists protested next to the Hungarian parliament building on Saturday, at which Jobbik leaders claimed that the World Jewish Congress had decided to meet in Hungary in an effort to "shame the Hungarian people." Jobbik is the third-largest party in Hungary, with 43 out of 386 parliamentary seats.

This is not the first time that members of Jobbik have expressed anti-Semitic sentiments. Jobbik leaders occasionally issue provocative statements about Jews, such as a call by Jobbik member of parliament Marton Gyongyosi last November to list all Jews in the government and parliament as potential national security risks. He later apologized but did not resign.

Some 80,000 to 100,000 Jews live among the 10 million people of Hungary, which was once a center of Jewish life in Europe and has seen a modest revival since communism ended in 1989.

"The Israeli occupiers, these invaders, need to look for a different country because Hungary is not for sale," Jobbik Chairman Gabor Vona told the rally. The charge, based on comments President Shimon Peres made in 2007 praising Israeli businesses abroad, has become a mantra in Jobbik's discourse about threats it says Hungary faces from Roma (Gypsies), Jews, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

"This kind of conspiracy theory has a long history in Hungary," said Peter Kreko, director of the Political Capital research and consulting company. Hungary's wartime fascist leaders used xenophobic charges to win support, he noted.

The World Jewish Congress decided to hold its assembly in Budapest, rather than Jerusalem, to highlight the rise of anti-Semitism and of the extreme Right in Europe. More than half a million Hungarian Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

Conservative Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who is due to address the congress' opening session Sunday evening, had ordered that the rally be banned. However, a court ruled Friday that police had overstepped their authority in trying to block it.

"Our country has become subjugated to Zionism. It has become a target of colonization, while we, the indigenous people, can play only the role of extras," Gyongyosi told the crowd. The rally ended after almost two hours, and the protesters dispersed without incident.

WJC spokesman Michael Thaidigsmann said, "We find it a worrying sign that these people express their anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli ideology in such a public way."

Yes, Hitler would be proud of this group. They even waved homemade signs with hand-drawn swastikas. They know their fascist history well: Blame the Jews for our economic woes.

Sickening. Pathetic. Can anyone even believe this is happening in Eastern Europe, just 70 years after the Holocaust?

Wake up, Europe. You missed Hitler the first time, at this stage in the anti-Semitic game. Will you repeat your mistakes again?

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