

The Glass House
The Zionist Underground
Budapest 1944

Hungary had allied with Germany and joined its war against Russia and the Allies in 1941. Despite that, and despite its antisemitic past, Jews had been relatively safe in Hungary from 1920 until the 19th of March 1944. Hungary was the only country in Europe where the *Palestina* office – the local office of the Jewish Agency – was in operation throughout the war.

The Head of the Palestine Office was Moshe Krausz, who had good connections with some of the Hungarian authorities and with the Swiss consulate, and especially with Karl Lutz, the officer in charge of foreign interests (including British interests) in the Swiss consulate.

As early as 1941 and 1942, Krausz, with Lutz's generous help, obtained temporary residence permits for Polish and Slovakian Jews, with the understanding that these would emigrate to Palestine.

Following the German occupation of Hungary in 1944, Krausz asked for Lutz's help to save as many Jews as possible. Ostensibly, there were 7800 unused certificates (entry permits to Palestine), and, following lengthy negotiations, the Hungarian authorities agreed to the emigration of 7800 Jews. The preparation of the list of emigrants and travel documents required office space, and since the town offices of a glass factory owned by the Weiss family were close to the Swiss consulate (now the American embassy), these were chosen for the purpose. At first, only the clerical work was done on the premises by the activists of the Zionist organization, including the issuing of the so called "Schutz passes" - documents certifying that the bearer was included in the emigration project, and was thus under the protection of the Swiss consulate.

The so called "Consular Office" opened in the "Glass House" at the end of July 1944. At that time, 350,000 Jews had already been deported to Auschwitz, and only the Jews of Budapest, those in hiding, and the "labour battalions" remained.

At this point in time, reports about Auschwitz had reached Budapest through two young men from Slovakia who had succeeded in escaping from there. Krausz sent the account on to Switzerland. It was then published all over the free world, and very strong pressure was exerted on the Regent Horthy, who ordered the deportations to stop. They did indeed stop on the 7th or 8th of July 1944, as Horthy replaced the government, bringing about a relatively quiet period until the 15th of October 1944. During all of these months the "Glass House" functioned at a low key, because emigration was becoming more and more difficult.

On the 15th of October, Horthy ordered the Hungarian army to lay down their arms, and the Germans responded by arresting him and appointing the most extreme fascist – Szalasi – as Head of State.

Eichman then returned to Budapest. Deportations started again, this time on foot as there were no trains available. These were the famous "death marches" on the road to Vienna. To everybody's surprise, even the extreme fascists recognized the

extraterritoriality and diplomatic immunity of the "Glass House".

By now, the "Glass House" had become the centre of Zionist resistance. First the activists stayed in the house. Then they brought in their families. The youth movements entered the house in large numbers, and occupied parts of the spacious store rooms. There were the loft of the "Mizrachi", the cellar of "HaShomer Hatzair", and the loft of "Hanoar HaTzioni". Altogether between 3,000 and 4,000 people found refuge in the "Glass House" and the adjacent building.

The "Glass House" was also the centre of rescue operations all over the town. At first, only 7,800 "Schutz passes" were issued. Later, at the instigation of the youth movements, a large number of "Schutz passes" (estimates range between 60,000 and 70,000 !) were forged and distributed. This entire operation, including the provision of food for the so called "safe houses", was performed mainly by members of the Zionist youth movements with the generous help of Consul Lutz.

The "Glass House" was liberated on the 18th of January 1945.

Today, under the auspices of the Lutz foundation, there is a room of remembrance in the "Glass House" at 29, Vadasz Street.

On Saturday, the 18th of November, the room of remembrance will be open to the participants of the conference. The exact opening hours will be announced at a later date.

A. J. Shafat