

János M. Bak

1939–47... and Since

A "Jewish Class" in a Budapest High School

On 8 September 1939, just a week after the first shots of the Second World War were fired, thirty-eight ten-year-old boys (myself included) entered Class I/B of the Dániel Berzsenyi Hungarian Royal Grammar School in Budapest's 5th district (Magyar Királyi Berzsenyi Dániel Gimnázium, henceforth: BDG), a humanist secondary school named after a nineteenth-century Hungarian poet. It was a historical moment, not only in the life of the youngsters, but also because this was the first *gimnázium* class in Hungary for which pupils were selected on a religious basis: a segregated Jewish class. In the wake of the Second Anti-Jewish Law (Law IV of 1939), a *numerus clausus* (limitation of enrollment) was introduced in high schools: most schools would admit at most two or three Jews to every class, "Israelites" by religion (Nürnberg racial criteria were not applied at this stage), and three Budapest boys' grammar schools started fully segregated "Jewish classes."¹ The I/B of BDG was such a class.

Legal restriction of the civil rights of Jews had by that time a fairly long history in Hungary. The first *numerus clausus*, at that time only in regard to higher education, was put into effect in 1920. It did not specify that the admission of Jews to universities should be limited: the purpose was clear but the language was less explicit. The law prescribed that "minorities" should take part in higher education only in proportion to their ratio in the population of the country. This measure was relaxed in 1928² but remained operative in practice, manipulated in one way

I ■ I do not know how many "Jewish classes" were opened in girls' grammar schools. Before WWII secondary schools in Hungary were not co-educational. It is worth noting that due to the school's location, the pupils of BDG were in earlier years as well in the majority Jews or with a Jewish background. In the year before us ca. 60 per cent of the pupils were "Israelites" by religion.

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Class I/B in Spring 1940

or another, referring to candidates' "national commitment" or similar criteria. Four later laws referred explicitly to Jews (Laws XV of 1938, IV of 1939, XV of 1941, and XV of 1942), restricting Jewish presence in the civil service, the professions, in commerce, and finally also in landholding. Until the German occupation in March 1944, however, there were many loopholes, allowing professionals and entrepreneurs alike to earn their livelihood in some semi-legal way, often tolerated by the authorities. During the war thousands of Jews were taken to labour camps first within the country, later to the Russian front, and at the end "lent" to the SS. Increasingly the criteria of who counted as Jew was racial. In the beginning, only those were regarded as Jews whose religion was registered as Israelite, whereas later evidence that two and finally three generations were non-Jewish had to be produced.

BDG was one of the best state grammar schools in Budapest. Several of its faculty members held honorary or part-time university positions as dr. habil. (advanced scholarly degree), making them eligible to teach at a university. (At least two of our teachers became well-known professors of Budapest University.)³ Founded in 1858, it was located in central Budapest, in Markó

2 ■ Earlier, the number of students with a Jewish background was as high as 34 per cent in the faculties of medicine, arts and law, at a time when Jews accounted for no more than 6 per cent of the population. My father, for example, graduated from the University of Leipzig, Germany, but then, in 1929, was allowed to obtain his doctorate in Budapest.

3 ■ Tibor Kardos, a Renaissance scholar, was professor and for many years dean of the Arts Faculty of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest; István Borzsák was professor and for a long time head of the Department of Latin at Eötvös Loránd University. László Vajthó taught at the Technical University and was a well-known editor and sponsor of both old and modern Hungarian literature. Our science professors Pál Bite and László Karádi also held positions in higher education. There could have been more. Actually, the head of BDG during our first years, János Pálffy, taught Egyptology at Budapest University.

Street, near the local and high courts (and their jail), in what was called Lipótváros (named after the Archduke Leopold of Habsburg). Part of this district (Újlipótváros, New Leopoldtown) was north of the *körút*, the ring-road, developed in the early twentieth century, an area of modern housing, inhabited largely by members of the professional middle class, many of them assimilated Jews. As an indication of this concentration of Jews, I remember that a great number, perhaps some forty per cent, of the so-called “Jewish houses” were located in this district when, in June 1944, Jews had to move from other blocks into crowded flats: one room per family in houses marked by huge yellow Stars of David.⁴ Moreover, the “International Ghetto” (houses under the protection of the foreign legations) was also located there, in the neighbourhood of St. Stephen’s Park.⁵ Most students of BDG lived in Leopoldtown, old and new.

In the following I attempt to reconstruct, as far as possible, the fate of the thirty-six boys of Class I/B (two left before the end of the first year and we know nothing about them) during their stay at BDG and in the 62 years since their *érettségi* (baccalaureate) in 1947. This is certainly not a random sample, but it is a typical cohort of Jewish middle-class males born in 1928–9. It may therefore be of interest as a “case study” of sorts. My summary is based on the memory of those classmates whom I have been able to consult in 2007–9 personally or by correspondence, and on information available in the public domain, documents or biographical entries in encyclopaedias. Five of us live in Budapest, and I was able to contact ten others in different parts of the world. However, our “community of memory” is larger than the original class who started school in 1939, as we remember an additional few boys who joined the class in the course of the subsequent eight years for longer or shorter periods of time. In 1942, BDG was merged with a neighbouring school, the former science-oriented Bolyai *reálgimnázium*, from which four students joined the class. After the war, the class was reorganized—now, of course, not on religious or racial lines—thus we graduated in Class VIII/A or VIII/B.

According to school records, a few more pupils were formally registered in our class (or passed private exams with us) in one or another of the eight years,⁶ but since we remember nothing about them, they do not feature here.

The response of the surviving classmates to my information gathering was very diverse. Amongst the first to respond were émigrés, but not the academics. Some of them were skeptical about the project of putting together a “virtual

4 ■ See Szabolcs Szita, “A budapesti csillagos házak (1944–45)” [The Starred Houses in Budapest, 1944–45]. *Remény*, Spring 2002. My family had to give up a four-room flat in a house declared “non-Jewish” and move into a room near the River Danube. I wasn’t too unhappy, for there were a number of young people, some friendly and pretty girls and good company there.

5 ■ Actually, presently the district is (again?) seen as a quarter of liberal Jews and was a target of right-wing groups, including a Molotov cocktail attack at a shop just a year ago. The nickname “New-Zs-land” (where “Zs” stands for “zsidó”—Jew) seems to be current for the area.

6 ■ The Annuals show twelve such names.

class reunion" on the web and suggested that I just list the "famous" (those who, in politics or otherwise, had made a name for themselves) and forget about the rest. I found it typical for the socio-cultural group that achievements in science or business counted little in their/our minds. Two or three former classmates abroad did not wish to be associated with a "Jewish" history, or simply did not want to have their names or whereabouts made publicly accessible (at that point we were planning to produce a homepage with the class list). Gradually, most others—some only after two or three letters and my insistence—supplied me with information, but a few remained who did not feel like sharing their life histories with me. As for those who died before 2007, I relied on information available in encyclopaedias and the like, but in two cases I also obtained data from their families. Finally, I circulated my data to all known classmates and most of them were pleased; a few helped me formulate this commemoration of our past. Some even got in touch with long-lost friends thanks to the list.

Our memories of the eight years (or less) at BDG are, of course, a mix of typical high-school experiences and some specific ones, being young Jews in the ever-more repressive atmosphere of Horthy's (and then the Arrow Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi's) Hungary. In general, it seems that the school did not discriminate actively against the "Jewish classes" (there were four more following ours). Because of wartime shortages, the heating of the building became a problem and some classes were taught in the afternoon (secondary-school instruction usually ended at 1 or 2 p.m.), and two of the Jewish classes were moved to the less comfortable afternoon hours. This may not have been motivated by anti-Semitism, but perhaps it was. Actually, in the annuals of BDG between 1939 and 1943 the words *zsidó osztály* (Jewish class) features, if I am not mistaken, only once, when it is stated that in the second semester of 1943, National Defence was not taught to them. (By that time a good part of the pupils' fathers were serving as unarmed conscripts in forced-labour units at the Russian front, often exposed to murderous treatment by their superiors.) At some point, we were also separated from the mandatory paramilitary training as "Levente," and assigned—in a way parallel to our parents' fate—to some auxiliary tasks. Surveying the faculty assigned to these classes, there is no indication whatsoever that they would not have been taught by the best teachers.⁷ Moreover, there were such gestures as the initiative of our class and Latin teacher Sándor Égner in 1941 or 1942 to hold a Hanukkah feast in the class instead of (or besides) the general Christmas celebrations of the school. (Dr Égner, a polyglot maverick of German background, grew up in Máramaros (Marumureș), a multi-ethnic region with a sizeable

⁷ ■ I do not know whether that kind of petty corruption enjoyed by some teachers who "arranged" for mothers to bring them packed lunches on set days, was special for (rich?) Jewish pupils or not, but I suspect so.



Class IV/C in 1943, with Dr Égner in the middle

orthodox Jewish population, and so he was well acquainted with Jewish holidays.⁸) One of my classmates went as far as to record that “BDG was an island of peace and tolerance in the midst of the storm of blood.” Surely, there were anti-Semitic teachers⁹ (even card-carrying Nazis) and the nationalist–chauvinist rituals, mandatory in the Horthy era—public recital of revanchist poetry, prayer for our soldiers fighting a ‘defensive war’ (!) in Russia—were also imposed on us, but *grosso modo* the statement made by my classmate holds true. Someone told me that one or another of our teachers had helped pupils during the year of worst persecution.¹⁰ Classmates remember fights with pupils of the non-Jewish classes, but I also remember fights with pupils of the high school across the street, which counted as a BDG tradition. How much of that was different from typical boys’ roughing it up is difficult to decide *ex post*. In the darkest months of persecution in 1944 we did not attend school. We could not after 8 April, when Jews, compelled to wear a yellow star, were subjected to a partial curfew and allowed to be on the streets only for a few hours. And, of course, in the autumn of 1944, when most Budapest Jews were confined to a walled-in ghetto or were in hiding, we could not attend classes.

As mentioned above, after the war the sixth form (for the short spring term, as the school was damaged during the siege and reopened only in March 1945)

8 ■ I understand that Dr Égner attended several family receptions a propos the *bar mitzvah* of my classmates.

9 ■ One may assume that those who were members of Admiral Horthy’s “Order of the Valiants” (*vitézi rend*), an institution founded to reward active supporters of the régime, were *ex officio* anti-Semites; and both the first head and one of our teachers over several years were proud members of it. However, this title was also granted to decorated officers of the First World War without explicit political involvement.

10 ■ Gyula Horváth, a gym teacher and instructor of the paramilitary Levente classes, allowed me to manufacture a good number of blank Levente ID cards with the stamp “Of Christian origin including four grandparents” which could be made out in any name, even with a photo. They were very helpful to many friends during police or Arrow Cross raids.

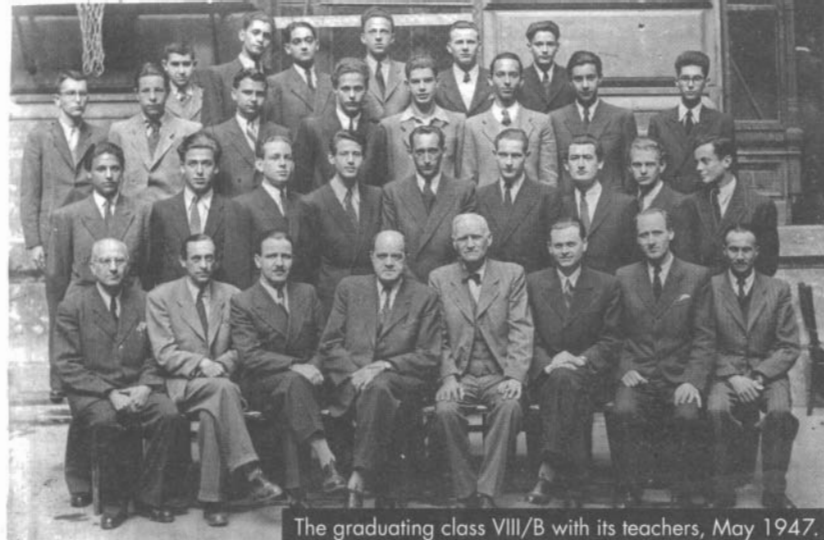
was restructured and remained thus for the last years. We sadly registered our—in comparison with the project of *Endlösung*, relatively few—losses caused by the German and Hungarian Nazi mass murder of Jews. That only (!?) three boys (maybe four) were killed during the Shoah is not surprising: the survival chances of sons of the professional upper-middle class of Budapest with ample financial resources and good connections to non-Jews were generally good. Many of us were able to procure false papers,¹¹ find Gentile friends who hid Jews, and most of us simply had good luck. (Such as an Arrow Cross thug taking a fancy at the pretty sister of a classmate. Since time ran out on him, he could not “collect his reward”). I have no precise data on the fate of my classmates in those months, but as far as I know almost all were in hiding, perhaps one or two survived in the Budapest Ghetto or in the houses under the protection of neutral states. By age, we were just at the margin of those who survived as “children” and those who were more endangered (taken to forced-labour units or the like) as “young men.” To be sure, the adults, such as our fathers’ parents and older siblings’ brothers, fared much worse. I have no precise figures, but many of them were killed either in forced-labour units or extermination camps or shot on the banks of the Danube in Budapest.

One boy was killed by a shrapnel during the allied bombardment of Budapest and one died in an accident soon after the liberation. A few classmates emigrated before the end of the eight years, so only twenty of the original thirty-six graduated together in 1947. During the two postwar years, many of us were engaged in politics and also spent quite some time attending war crimes trials (and public executions) in the court buildings near BDG.

In the sixty-odd years that passed since our graduation, Hungary went through several changes of regime, which I need not relate here. Not surprisingly, some of our classmates’ families left just before the Shoah (one, I believe, by *aliyah beth* [illegal immigration] for Palestine), or soon after the war (at least eleven, mostly to the Americas), when Communist takeover threatened the livelihood of entrepreneurs and free professionals alike. But it seems that the majority remained in Hungary and studied at universities or academies and/or did their duty as conscripts in the Hungarian People’s Army (at least five of us). During the Stalinist period, some were not allowed into higher education because of their “bourgeois origin.” Yet finally, as far as we know, almost all obtained a university degree or learnt a respectable trade.

Many of us—I have no exact data on this—supported the Communist regime at least for a time. This was, of course, typical for young Jews who

11 ■ A good method was to pretend to be refugees from Transylvania—by that time occupied by the Soviet Army and Romanian troops—and thus having lost our original documents. Once an identity card as “refugee” was issued, one could proceed to obtain other useful documents, e.g. ration cards for bread and meat.



The graduating class VIII/B with its teachers, May 1947.

expected that the Communists would be the most consistent anti-Fascists and lead the retribution for the crimes committed against Jews and other enemies of Nazism. It seemed logical that the explicitly declared enemies of the past regime, in which we were discriminated and persecuted, would be the right friends. In spite of our liberal, democratic—or Social Democratic—education, many of us embraced communism, as it seemed to offer unequivocal solutions to the complicated postwar situation. Let us not forget that in the first years it was by no means clear (to us!) that this militant movement with its romantic underground past and impressive intellectual heritage would become the instrument of ruthless repression. It took us a few years to realize that our initial expectations would be disappointed. The show trials, the inner-party purges, and the realization that the country was ruined by the Communists gradually opened the eyes of many of us.¹² This process was different with each person, and some of my classmates seem to have decided to stay with the “winning” party, some to the bitter end.

The next round of emigration followed the defeat of the revolution of 1956, when at least five of us left Hungary. The emigrants about whom we know live or lived all across the world: four ended up in Europe (UK, France, Spain), five in North America, five in Brazil, three in Australia. Several spent shorter times in other countries, including Israel. Because of the “unknown” category, it is not quite clear whether a slight majority or a slight minority remained in Hungary. I am the only one who returned to Budapest after the fall of communism; several emigrés visited Budapest in recent decades.

12 ■ For more on this, regarding also my personal experience, see György Litván, “Finding (and Losing?) the Right Path Together (1945–48),” in: *...The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways... Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, ed. Balázs Nagy & Marcell Sebök. Budapest: CEU Press, 1999, pp. 13–7.

A few summary statistics. According to the Yearbook of BDG for the school year 1939–40 (pp. 55–6), the profession of the parents of Class I/B were:

Factory owner	1	* I translate <i>tisztviselő</i> , “clerk,” as employee, since this category
Industrial employee*	7	covered people from bookkeepers to senior managers alike. (My father,
Wholesaler	4	at that time something like vice-president of a firm, would have been
Retailer	3	included in one of these categories.)
Commercial employee*	7	** The catch-all category “other professionals” does not allow more than
Other professional**	13	stating that a third of the pupils came from families of lawyers, medical
Retired	1	doctors, engineers and the like. Categories like “public servant” and
		“army officer” (very much present in the other classes) are empty, in the
		wake of the “restrictions on Jews in public life.”

The fate of the class (including some temporary classmates) in a few categories was, approximately, as follows. In terms of demography: six or seven died before 1947 (three or four as victims of persecution); three died young (before 1967), seven in middle age (before 1994, the last well-attended class reunion). Nine died since, eighteen are still alive, while we know nothing of six others.¹³ A few classmates wrote to me about their families, but not enough to include anything about them into the “statistics.” As to post-secondary studies: arts and social sciences 10; economics 6; engineering 6; medicine 6; science 6; other or none 4; unknown 5. Professional life: social sciences and humanities 6; engineering 5; medical (clinical and research) 6; other sciences 5; media 2; management 9; other 2; unknown 8. (In the case of career changes, I took the one longest pursued.)

As much as I was able to reconstruct the careers of the classmates, almost everyone about whom we know something had a fairly successful life. A few of us acquired a public profile. András Román (born Rechnitz), an architect, is regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern monument preservation efforts in Hungary; the rescue of the World Heritage village Hollókő, was his major project. Emil Horn, historian and museologist, set up the first historical exhibition (still under communism) on the persecution and mass murder of Hungarian Jews and Roma. Dan Danieli (born Dénes Faludi) became known as a researcher of the Holocaust and for his successful efforts in getting the merits of Captain Ocskay in rescuing a great number of Hungarian Jews acknowledged in Hungary and abroad. György Litván (who studied with us for a year) was not only a highly regarded historian,¹⁴ but also famous for having been the first to openly call upon the dictator Mátyás Rákosi to resign in the spring of 1956. He endured several years of jail for this and for his role in the

13 ■ Most of these are from the category of “transient” classmates. That holds true for the “unknown” group in the other statistics as well.

14 ■ One of his major opponents in Communist times was a schoolmate of ours from the parallel (“non-Jewish”) class, for a while head of the Marxism–Leninism Department of the Ministry of Education, who denounced the Hungarian non-Marxist progressive authors (such as Oscar Jászi, whose biography was written by György Litván). Actually, he is the only person from that class whose name became known later—at least, to me.

revolution and the resistance thereafter. Fittingly, in 1989 he became the founding director of the Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution. Márton Tardos (born Neuschloss), an economist who graduated with us, was a leading figure of the democratic opposition, theorist of transitional economics, and MP for the Free Democrats for several years. Early losses of the class were the philosopher Péter Ladányi, for all of the eight years one of the two consistently excellent students with straight As and in competition with the similarly straight-A fellow philosopher, Róbert Pártos. Both of them studied with George Lukács. Ladányi was remembered as an excellent teacher, though not a Marxist¹⁵, and both died young. Among the six classmates in medicine and related fields one developed medication for tuberculosis, another took part in interferon research; a mathematician became well known for his work on calculus. A short-time postwar classmate became a renowned engineer in Hungary, vice-president of the National Chamber of Engineers. Two classmates were active in Hungarian film and television; four are professors emeriti of universities in Hungary and abroad; six retired as senior managers of major companies. We know only of one or two failures, but maybe those who vanished from our horizon were not exactly successful either.

All in all, it seems to be true that in spite of first Nazi and then Communist discrimination and persecution of the Jewish (later also non-Jewish) middle class, the ca. fifty men of my larger sample managed to retain their social status, at home or abroad. Several of my classmates underlined that the years spent at BDG were crucial to their professional development and looked back at them with pride.¹⁶ If I am not mistaken, those who had left Hungary succeeded in rising higher than their parents, while achieving public acclaim was more likely for those who stayed. An exact comparison of the profession of parents and sons is not possible on the basis of the fragmentary data I have, but I assume that it would tell much the same tale. The factory owner and the commercial (wholesale and retail) categories would be replaced by entrepreneurial and senior managerial positions and among the sons of free professionals several would have been university teachers.

Even though this was a "Jewish class" I did not inquire into the relationship of my classmates to "Jewishness" during our time at school or afterwards.

15 ■ The philosopher Mihály Vajda remembered: "In my second year at the Lenin Institute, we had to choose between 'scientific socialism' and 'philosophy.' I took, of course, the latter. And lo and behold, a young man by the name of P. L. taught us the history of philosophy, someone who understood the Greeks and who did not talk about an author unless he had read all his surviving words. He committed suicide a few years later; I know not whether it was because of the persecution he suffered after the revolution ...". (<http://epa.oszk.hu/00700/00775/00036/1372-1382.html>; accessed 1 May 2009. My translation.)

16 ■ Professor Vajthó's having made Hungarian literature appreciated by us was noted by a respondent as a lifetime gift; I may add that eight years of Latin with excellent teachers was surely a basis of my later work as medievalist.

Based on my limited impressions, I suspect that religion and Jewish culture was and has remained rather marginal for the majority. None of us remembers, for example, classmates in whose households Jewish dietary rules would have been strictly observed. No doubt all of us were made aware of the negative implication of being Jews (nothing new for any of us) when we encountered official discrimination.¹⁷ If I remember correctly, during the dark years of 1942–44, several of my classmates observed Jewish customs (such as *bar mitzvah*) more seriously than they might have without the external pressure of discrimination. Religious instruction in school—mandatory until 1946—was rather formal. We were supposed to attend synagogue service every week, but nobody controlled it seriously.¹⁸ For most of the six or seven years our teacher was Adolf Fisch (a.k.a. Andrew József), who was also inspector of religious teaching, but as far as we remember, his classes were more about problems of life and everyday psychology than strictly Jewish subjects.¹⁹ As to our later life, I know about quite a few mixed marriages, and I have already mentioned that none of us remained in Israel (even those who had spent some time there).²⁰ I am not aware of any of my ex-classmates being an active or observant Jew (or serious practitioner of any other religion, for that matter). Such attitudes are not surprising for the Leopoldtown professional (and other) middle class of then or now.

A certain Jewish identity was enforced, by discrimination, on many of us—I think at least a dozen boys from the class—who belonged to one of the boy-scout troops expelled from the Hungarian Boy Scouts Association in 1940 as “Jews.” The No. 311 Mihály Vörösmarty and the No. 191 Miklós Toldi Boy Scout Troop were either expressly Jewish or had mostly assimilated Jewish members.²¹ Scouting was a very important youth movement in interwar Hungary. Troops were supported by churches, schools, and even factories. (In 1933, one of the major international Jamborees was held in Gödöllő, near Budapest, and the scholar-

17 ■ In contrast to the survey by Ferenc Erős, András Kovács and Katalin Lévai: “Hogyan jöttem rá, hogy zsidó vagyok?” [How Did I Find Out That I Am Jewish?], *Medvetánc*, 1985/2–3, pp. 129–145, which found that some persons did not know this till late in age if at all, none of us would have been unaware of our official denomination, as in interwar Hungary religious instruction at school was mandatory.

18 ■ I believe it is typical that Nobel Prize laureate Imre Kertész (slightly younger than us) found it credible that the hero of his *Fatelessness*, a 14-year-old Budapest Jewish boy, heard Kaddish recited for the first time in the concentration camp.

19 ■ His postwar activity is recorded by Attila Novák in “Jewish Homes and Orphanages in Hungary after World War II” (<http://iremember.hu/text/articles/israel60novak.html>, accessed May 10, 2009). He was arrested in the infamous “Zionist trial” and released only after Stalin’s death. He finally became a maths teacher in a Budapest school. We always had the impression that he made his living teaching religious instruction only *faute de mieux*.

20 ■ I heard recently that someone’s grandchild became a religious Jew (after a visit to Hungary!) and is presently studying in a rabbinical institute in Jerusalem.

21 ■ Mihály Vörösmarty (1800–55) was a leading Hungarian poet. Toldi was a knight in the fourteenth century, made famous by an epic poem of the nineteenth-century writer János Arany. The choice of names indicates the essentially “Magyar” orientation of both troops.

politician, twice prime minister Count Pál Teleki was chief scoutmaster.²²) The Vörösmarty troop was founded in 1924 by, and remained connected to, the Buda Israelite Congregation. The Toldi troop was even older, formed in 1922 when several existing troops were merged.²³ While the Vörösmarty was formally connected to a religious sponsor, the Toldi troop was supported by a consortium of schools and later (I believe, after being excluded from the official Scouting Association) by the Hungarian Esperanto Society, but had very few non-Jewish members. Tolerance for believers and non-believers was characteristic of both.

At the 80th anniversary of the foundation of No. 311, the speaker spelled out: "Our identity was fourfold: we were Magyars, we were Jews, Boy Scouts—and, above all, we were Vörösmarty boys and girls." We were deeply disturbed when, in 1941, we were no longer allowed to display the triangular Hungarian badge on our (then also prohibited but in parts retained) uniforms. We had been just as keen on collecting and singing Hungarian folk songs and saluting the red-white-green tricolour as any other boy scout troop in Hungary, and (as I see from Vörösmarty publications as far back as the 1930s) "Christmas hikes" were listed unproblematically besides Hanukkah celebrations. In the Vörösmarty troop, religious instruction was in principle included in the training of the boys (later also girls) but in fact was not pursued with any emphasis. Our perception of being persecuted increased and our patriotism certainly decreased when first the oldest and then all the senior scouts were called up into forced-labour units and the long-cherished tents of summer camps and other equipment were turned into clothing and equipment. Few of them returned after the war.²⁴

However sketchy and subjective all this may be, I know of no similar inquiry into the fate of a comparable group, such as the other Jewish classes at BDG which started in 1940–43 (one of them included George Soros). To be sure, a few years of age difference made their fates in many respects different from ours.²⁵ Yet, from a cursory look at their class lists and the fragmentary information about some of them (quite a few being younger brothers of my classmates) I would venture to say that our story is fairly typical and perhaps, not uninteresting. ❧

22 ■ He was actually attacked by the far right for supporting such a "British" thing as scouting.

23 ■ Jewish Scouting in Hungary—some 12 troops with ca. 2000 boys and a few hundred girls as members—is a subject in itself. I include this paragraph only because for many of us the boy-scout troop was a much more important community than the school class. Actually, when in the late twentieth century we planned to hold class reunions, we scheduled them for dates when there was an "ex-Toldists" meeting. For that occasion more classmates were likely to travel halfway across the world.

24 ■ At a recent Vörösmarty anniversary meeting more than a hundred victims were remembered. The troop may have counted some 200–250 boys and girls in the 1940s. I have no comparable numbers for Toldi, but they would hardly be lower.

25 ■ As mentioned above, the majority of the pupils of previous years, not segregated by religion, would have suffered fates more tragic than ours, being in the age group of those taken to labour camps or murdered in forced marches towards Germany. It would be interesting to compare the life stories of the parallel "non-Jewish" classes, but I have insufficient information to attempt anything of the sort. To be sure, there were several boys in those who, as baptised Jews, would have been in a situation rather similar to ours during the war—and, maybe, thereafter.