

Nazi war criminal Laszlo Csatory arrested in Budapest

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The Budapest state attorney has placed Hungarian war criminal Laszlo Csatory under house arrest. The 97-year-old is accused of being involved in the murder of 16,000 Hungarian Jews during the Second World War. In 1948, he was sentenced to death in absentia in Czechoslovakia.

The Hungarian authorities pursued Csatory only after reporters from the British tabloid the *Sun* tracked him down and published photos of him. He was living in an apartment in a posh district of Budapest.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) in Jerusalem has been pursuing Csatory for decades. As SWC Director Efraim Zuroff reported, the Hungarian justice system had evidence in 2006 that Csatory was in Budapest. For two years, the authorities had been aware of his address but had done nothing.

Csatory was high on the SWC wanted list. As chief of police in 1944 in Kassa—now the Slovak town of Kosice—he is accused of being responsible for the deportation of nearly 15,700 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz, and to have acted with sadistic brutality. As early as 1941, he is said to have deported 300 Jews from the Ukrainian city of Kamianets-Podilskyi. The area was conquered by the German Wehrmacht (army), and shortly afterwards the Nazis perpetrated a massacre of 23,600 Jews there.

After he was sentenced to death in 1948, Csatory fled to Canada, where he lived with a new identity until his expulsion in 1997. After his return to Hungary, he was able to disappear without hindrance.

Csatory, who is said to be in good physical and mental condition, was questioned last Wednesday for the first time by the prosecutor's office in Budapest. Following a report by the Hungarian news agency MTI, the authorities then sought an arrest warrant.

According to media reports, when questioned, the

97-year-old rejected all charges against him on the grounds that he had at that time “only been following orders” and “doing his duty” as chief of police.

The fact that Csatory could live undisturbed for years in Hungary raises doubts whether he will ever stand trial and face conviction. “I’m not sure that the discovery will have legal consequences under this conservative government,” Serge Klarsfeld, the Nazi hunter, told the news agency AFP.

The Hungarian government of the right-wing Citizens Federation (Fidesz) under Victor Orban is currently reviving fascist and authoritarian traditions.

The constitution adopted under Fidesz enshrines God, Christianity and pride in the thousand-year history of Hungary as legally binding standards. The text refers to the “historical” heritage of Hungary and, according to Orban, has ended the period in which “the Hungarians [were] systematically suppressed”. The content of the new constitution has links to the fascist dictatorship of Miklos Horthy in the 1930s and 1940s. The term “republic” has disappeared from the name of the country.

Under Horthy, the Hungarian authorities deported more than 400,000 Jews to Auschwitz or had them murdered. Today, under the influence of Orban and the far-right party Jobbik, a veritable Horthy cult has developed. In mid-May, a statue of Horthy was set up in Kereki in southwest Hungary—the first to be erected since the end of the dictatorship in 1945. In Debrecen, a commemorative plaque to Horthy was recently unveiled, and in the town of Gyömrő, southeast of Budapest, a park now bears his name. Further Horthy statues are to be erected in various cities, including Budapest.

In addition to representatives of Jobbik, which draws on the tradition of the Nazi Arrow Cross, and the

Catholic Church, Fidesz politicians are also regularly present at inauguration festivities. Orban claims that this is solely the doing of the local municipalities, which are often run by right-wing Fidesz and Jobbik politicians. “Why does Fidesz stand alongside the Arrow Cross—how far have things come with us?” commented political scientist Zoltan Somogyi on this development.

In addition to Horthy, other Nazi figures are also being reinstated. At the behest of the Hungarian parliament, writer Jozsef Nyiro, who died in 1953 and was once sought for war crimes, has been reburied in Transylvania with a state funeral. Nyiro was a cultural ideologist under Horthy. After the takeover of the fascist Arrow Cross in October 1944, he was a member of the Hungarian National Assembly and fled from the Red Army to Austria. Under the protection of Franco, he was finally able to settle in Madrid.

Orban is pursuing his right-wing course against the backdrop of massive attacks on the living standards of broad sections of society. The austerity measures adopted by his right-wing government must, sooner or later, trigger protests and social conflicts. Orban wants to prevent this through the revival of fascist traditions and the fomenting of nationalism.

In this political climate, a serious case against Laszlo Csatory is hardly likely. This is clear from the preliminary excuses made by the Budapest state attorney’s office. They have stated that the investigation would be “very difficult” because the crime scene lies in another country and the events happened more than half a century ago.



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