



Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution during World War II by István Deák.

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In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the present-day Ukrainian city of Lviv was the capital of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria and part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the First World War, Lviv—then called Lwów—came under Polish rule. At the start of World War II, in September 1939, it submitted to the Red Army. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the Wehrmacht captured the city. Between 1941 and 1944, German rulers committed countless atrocities in Lviv. Near the end of war, in July 1944, the Red Army recaptured the city from the Germans. How did local governments and individuals behave during this tumultuous period? In *Europe on Trial*, historian István Deák (Columbia Univ.) skillfully demonstrates that time, place, and circumstance determined whether individuals collaborated, resisted, or sought retribution. Indeed, many regions during World War II—particularly in eastern Europe—suffered occupations by three or four different foreign powers, under very diverse conditions.

Deák proves that many of Germany's allies eagerly collaborated in the civil and ethnic wars that submerged Europe in World War II. He asserts that the war placed "Europe on trial" and that the continent as a whole fared "badly" (225). He identifies and analyzes in detail four key phenomena that characterized the war in Europe—accommodation, collaboration, resistance, and retribution.

In general, Deák designates as "accommodation" the actions of those who "tried to get by" and behave in a "nonpolitical" manner (4). In contrast, "collaborators" willingly supported the Germans due to either shared ideology or self-interest. "Resistance" is defined here as any act that impeded the enemy in any way. Lastly, "retribution" embraces acts of violence, judicial trials, and political purges. Deák stresses that his four categories are not mutually exclusive. A collaborator in 1942 might become, under a different occupying power, a resister in 1944. For instance, the reviled René Bousquet served as secretary general in Vichy France, but took part in resistance activities near the end of the war. Bousquet later faced a range of reprisals for his actions: he was tried in French courts and excluded from the French public service. In the end, he was shot dead in 1993 by a countryman, Christian Didier, who claimed the killing was justified by Bousquet's wartime collaboration.

Deák divides the war into three periods. During the first (September 1939 to June 1941), the Third Reich encountered little resistance from a mostly passive European populace (27). The second phase began with Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 and ended with the German surrender at Stalingrad in January 1943; collaboration with the Germans peaked in these two periods. The third phase (January 1943 to May 1945) witnessed numerous acts of retribution, extending even beyond the war's end. Resistance and accommodation were common throughout the conflict.

The author notes that Polish gentiles and Europe's Jews were never afforded the opportunity to freely choose between accommodation, collaboration, or resistance. Indeed, Poland's gentiles were prohibited from working, either politically or militarily, alongside their German occupiers, at least in any formal, official capacity (2). Poles were not employed, for example, as concentration camp guards

or required to join the Waffen-SS. And, of course, as targets of mass extermination, Jews had few or no options during the war.

Aside from these two groups, most European nations, whether allied with Germany or threatened by its aggression, took part in its crimes. Deák reproaches the countries of northern and western Europe (apart from Britain and Poland) for their fatal lack of preparation and resistance. In maintaining their neutralities after the First World War, these nations deliberately limited the size of their armed forces (42). Had they, for example, instituted universal conscription, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and France could have fielded a combined military force of eight to nine million men. By advocating defense over offense and limiting their armies, they effectively capitulated to unrepentant German expansion.

Deák also criticizes Germany's allies. Contrary to popular opinion, Italy, Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, and Bulgaria enjoyed considerable autonomy during the war, for a number of reasons:

first ... the German alliance system was murky, confusing, and open to diverse interpretations; second ... the independence of Germany's allies gave them the freedom to maneuver but also made their leaders and their citizenry responsible for the war crimes and crimes against humanity they committed; third ... many of Germany's allies were hostile to each other to an extent unheard of in history; and fourth ... Germany's allies used the war as an effective instrument for ridding their country of ethnic and religious minorities. In other words, nearly all engaged in some form of ethnic cleansing. (82)

Thus, wartime conditions gave both Germany *and its allies* the chance to seize, expel, and even kill unwanted minorities, Jews in particular.

With regard to the "Final Solution," the author writes that the Third Reich's allies participated in the ethnic cleansing of their minority populations for reasons of antisemitism, anticommunism, or the self-interested desire to expand their own territories. He maintains, furthermore, that this was true not only in eastern Europe. While Denmark succeeded in protecting most of its Jewish citizens, Norway and the Netherlands made little effort to do so. Less than 20 percent of Dutch Jews survived the war. Deák also reminds his readers that local administrators of the Channel Islands, a British Crown dependency, worked with the occupying Germans to compile lists of Jewish families for the Gestapo. Though most of these Jews died in Hitler's camps, no islanders were ever tried or punished for their actions.

Finally, Deák masterfully details acts of retribution. In western Europe, for example, women who had sexual relations with German soldiers were severely dealt with by the Norwegian court system (204) and offspring of such relations were denied citizenship. In France, "horizontal collaborators," as they were called, had their heads shaved.

The author observes that postwar national or people's courts were often deeply flawed. Ideology, politics, and vengeance often marred the proceedings. And yet, he writes, despite the chaos and confusion, "justice was indeed served" (207). According to Deák, the postwar trials, however defective, were Europe's first attempt to deal with political criminals on such a large scale, and "those who were punished for good reason far outnumbered those who had been innocent" (208). Remarkably, the harshest sentences were handed down in northern and western Europe, especially Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands. In the latter, 150,000 people were detained after the war and some 60,000 of them convicted of various crimes. In Norway, 90,000 people were brought to trial, nearly 4 percent of the total population. Elsewhere, 300,000 ordinary people in Hungary were punished by imprisonment and/or loss of employment or civil rights. However, as Deák rightly points out, about two-thirds were ethnic Germans who were ultimately deported.

In the end, no country emerges from Deák's analysis unscathed. Even the Americans were complicit after the war, accepting over a thousand German scientists, many of them former Nazis, to work in their rocket and space programs. Indeed, the war placed not only Europe, but the rest of the world on trial.

In *Europe on Trial*, István Deák offers a penetrating and often distressing analysis of the complex moral and ethical dilemmas facing Europeans during World War II. In the process, he writes a much needed counter narrative to the better known, uplifting stories of courage and honorable behavior. His far more multifaceted tale exposes the indifference and overall inhumanity of Europeans during the war.