

*Déak, István: Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution in WW II.*

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“Collaboration” and “resistance” have long served as the primary categories for understanding Europeans’ responses to Nazi occupation during the Second World War. At the forefront of a relatively recent effort amongst historians to complicate this binary, the Hungarian-American historian István Déak has argued that the wide spectrum of reactions to German conquest requires a far more flexible and nuanced approach to classification. In his most recent effort to align both scholars and their students behind this historiographical shift, “Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution in WWII” surveys the courses charted by European societies as they navigated different positions within Hitler’s empire. While the work resembles a textbook in format and general scope, it focuses thematically on the shifting relationships between occupier and occupied over time and space. Tracing their trajectories from the humiliation of Munich and the fatalism of France’s capitulation to the military reversals on the Eastern Front in 1942-43 and beyond, Déak thus challenges the reader to understand “collaborators” and “resisters” as dynamic actors in an unstable moral and political universe, not simply

hardened fascists or zealous patriots locked in ideological crusades. The book further differentiates the experience of German occupation according to several factors, including to each subject territory's political history, ideological proclivities, strategic utility, ethnic content, and perhaps most critically, geographical position within the Western or Eastern theatre of the war in Europe.

A project of this breadth is bound to invite accusations of overgeneralization and the author duly acknowledges the work's limitations. Déak prefers to illustrate with examples rather than expansive detail, highlighting some of the striking moral ambiguities that characterized life under occupation. How to judge the so-called Polish "blue policemen" who spent their weeks hunting down Jews and handing them over to the German authorities, and on the weekends joined anti-Nazi partisan units in blowing up supply trains? Is offering a German soldier a glass of water tantamount to collaboration? To what extent can we justify acts of resistance that incurred mass reprisals against civilians? In foregrounding such questions, "Europe on Trial" shows itself long on socratic interrogation and less concerned with definitive pronouncements. Though he concludes that, in opposition to some military historians, "resistance" actually hastened the end of the war, Déak appears more compelled to emphasize the strange and terrible ethical quandaries which occupation at times engendered.

The historian of postwar Europe will likely find most useful the final chapter on "The Long Aftermath" of collaboration, resistance and retribution, as it offers a much needed foray into the political legacies of postwar justice in both the Soviet-dominated and Western European nations. Indeed, conflicting evaluations of wartime "collaboration" and "resistance" in the arena of contemporary European politics remind us that, as Déak remarks, "the war and the German presence were not the only reasons social upheavals and revolutions engulfed Europe" from 1939-1945 (p. 2). As the best works on this period have done, Déak demonstrates with "Europe on Trial" that the fates of European societies took shape according to complex regional and internal developments and not simply the whims of an erstwhile master.