

Komoly Ottó (originally Kohn Ottó)

Leader of the Hungarian Zionist Movement (1892-1945)

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Born in Hungary as the son of a well known family of Zionists. His father, David Kohn, in following Theodor Herzl's call, was among those who laid the foundations of the Zionist Movement in Hungary. Obviously, Ottó was influenced by the Zionist atmosphere in his parent's home and there was also formed his Zionist point of view.

He finished high school and in 1914, while studying civil engineering at the technical high school of Budapest, he joined the Army and took part in the fighting at the Italian front. He was advanced to the rank of captain in the Austro-Hungarian army. In 1916 he was wounded and was decorated with the high and important military medal 'Signum Laudis 2nd rank. Owing to wounds sustained he was posted to the reserve outfits until the end of the war.

In 1919 he published under his original name Kohn Ottó his first book, titled: *A Zsidó Nép Jövöje* (The Future of the Jewish People), in which he analyzed the situation of the Jewish people in the diaspora and emphasized the solution of the Jewish problem in centralizing the Jewish People in the Land of Israel.

In 1940 he was elected vice chairman of the Zionist organization in Hungary, and one year later he became chairman.

In 1942 he published his second paper *Cionista Életszemlélet* (Zionist View of Life) in which he accentuated his Zionist point of view.

In 1943, after a large number of Jewish refugees (from Croatia, Czechia, Slovakia, Poland) who fled from the brutal Nazis and their assistants were concentrated in the Hungarian capital, the Hungarian Zionist Organisation decided to establish and operate a "Relief Rescue Committee" for these refugees. Komoly became its head and Dr. Rezsö Kasztner his deputy. In the course of his activities he established firm contacts with high church dignitaries in Hungary and with diverse and important members of Parliament, with the aim of aiding and saving the Jewish refugees and helping them to make Aliya (to emigrate) to Eretz-Israel.

On 19.03.1944 the German Army occupied Hungary and the Zionist activities of Komoly went underground.

Owing to his having been decorated with a prestigious military medal enabled him to be exempted from forced labour and later on even from transferring to the Budapest Ghetto with all the other Jews.

With this freedom of movement Komoly continued his activities in aiding and saving and now even as a senior representative of the International Red Cross.

Meanwhile, in the course of the Soviet Army approaching the Hungarian Frontie changes to the worst became the Jews of Budapest. In October 1944 the Hungar

government was seized by Szálasi Ferenc, leader of the extreme Fascist movement, who decided to bestow on the Jews in the Ghetto of Budapest the fate of their brethren in the provinces, i.e. to annihilate them. Komoly intensified his efforts to counter this intention, but on 01.01.1945, one fortnight before Budapest was occupied by the Soviet Army, Komoly was kidnapped out of the offices of the International Red Cross by a group of Fascists of the "Arrow Cross" movement who claimed falsely to only ask for some answers to their questions. Since then his whereabouts were lost forever.

After the liberation of Hungary from the Nazi occupation, the new government decided to award Komoly posthumously the high decoration of "Order of Hungarian Freedom", in recognition and esteem of his widespread activities in promoting freedom and democracy during the Holocaust. The medal was given to his family in 1947.

Later on, the State of Israel decided to memorialize Komoly's activities by calling a co-operative village (Moshav), whose inhabitants came from Hungary with his name. This is "Yad-Nathan" in the Lakhish district. Some time later, in 1969 a Cultural Center in the same village was inaugurated with his name.

In the possession of the Strochlitz Document Center is a box containing his personal diaries for the years 1935 – 1944, besides various documents and articles written about him, which put lights on the widespread activities of Komoly as a Zionist leader during the Holocaust.

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