

THE MANFRED WEISS-SS DEAL OF 1944

Excerpt from the Memoirs of George Hoff, Legal Counsel

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Employment with the Manfred Weiss Works

In the fall of 1937 I was called in for military training. I had to quit my employment as the sole associate of an attorney in Budapest specializing in patent and trade mark matters and during my absence my position was filled. Thus, upon my discharge from military service I had to look for a new employment and, in line with my ambition eventually to become associated with a large business enterprise as its general counsel, I was interested, above all, in finding a legal position in the industry.

In the course of my inquiries I learned that the general counsel of the largest industrial concern in Hungary, headed by the Manfred Weiss Iron and Metal Works, had died a few months earlier, and although his associate, a former judge, was engaged by the company as legal counsel, his sphere of activity was limited. I was told that although at that time the company had no plan to engage an additional lawyer, either as general counsel or in any other capacity, the situation was fluid and an adroit young lawyer might find there a position with a bright future. This prospect ideally suited my ambitions.

The Manfred Weiss industrial concern developed out of a preserve factory established by Manfred and Berchtold Weiss, sons of a Hungarian Jewish mill owner, in 1884. Later Berchtold sold his interest in the company to his brother Manfred, who in a few decades developed it into the second largest iron mill in Central Europe. During World War I, the company supplied great quantities of war material for the Austria-Hungarian military and in recognition of his patriotic services, Manfred Weiss had been given the hereditary title of "baron" by the last king of Hungary.

In 1922 Baron Weiss died. His immense fortune was inherited by his two sons and four daughters who formed a holding company through which they controlled the industrial empire growing up around the Manfred Weiss Works. The two sons of Manfred Weiss, Eugene and Alfons, became directors (according to American terminology "vice presidents") of the company, Eugene in charge of engineering matters and Alfons supervising the commercial operations. Major policy decisions were made in family counsel, including two brothers-in-law, Francis Chorin, president of a coal mine and of the Hungarian Manufacturers Association and life member of the Upper House of the Hungarian parliament; and Baron Moritz Kornfeld, also a life member of the Upper House and a member of the counsel of the Hungarian National Bank.

One of my father's patients, Baroness Hatvany, was a close friend of Baron Alfons

Weiss and upon my father's request, she mentioned to Baron Alfons my interest in a legal position with the Manfred Weiss Works. Shortly afterward I was interviewed by Baron Alfons and, apparently, he was favorably impressed by me. As I learned later, Baron Alfons first considered employing me as an expert on patent law; however, the head of the company's engineering department was not interested in having a lawyer on his staff. Then Baron Alfons discussed my possible employment with the head of the business department, a certain director Jünker (brother of the deceased general counsel), who thought that a young and able business-oriented lawyer could be well used by the company; however, he wanted to have more information about my abilities.

Upon learning of this development I turned to Professor Edmund Kuncz for a letter of recommendation. In my last year as a law student I was professor Kuncz's "adjunctus" at the Law School of the University of Budapest and it was largely due to his recommendation that I obtained a government fellowship for study in Geneva, Switzerland in the academic year 1935-36. It turned out that Kuncz knew Baron Kornfeld personally and he suggested that I should draft and type up a letter of recommendation in his name addressed to Baron Kornfeld. As Kuncz put it, "You know best what they want to hear about you". Next day Baron Kornfeld learned from a letter signed by Prof. Kuncz that the Manfred Weiss concern had an opportunity to engage a well prepared, talented and most promising young lawyer as legal counsel.

A few weeks later I was employed by the Manfred Weiss Works and was given an office next to that of Judge Fenes, the former associate of the company's deceased general counsel. I made an excellent start. The business executives who had been frequently frustrated by the unbending attitude of Judge Fenes were pleased with my more practical approach to their problems. For a while occasionally I had to fake it because I lacked the necessary business and legal experience. However, I worked hard and learned fast.

I also soon gained the confidence of Baron Alfons Weiss. I was frequently called to his office for consultation or participation in negotiations and after a couple of years I was assigned a new office, right above the office of Baron Alfons in a building where up to that time only the Weiss family members and their financial advisor had offices.

Shortly thereafter Andreas Lázár, a former minister of justice, was appointed general counsel of the Manfred Weiss Works. However, until the German occupation of Hungary, Lázár was an outside counsel whose appointment had no effect on my responsibilities.

My work at the Manfred Weiss Works was interrupted twice because I was called in for military service for several months in connection with preparations for war first against Czechoslovakia and the second time against Romania. Baron Alfons disliked my absence and upon his order I was put on the short list of "indispensable" company employees. This was a boon for me because consequently I was exempted from further military service and — most importantly — I was saved from service in World War II.

In the morning of March 19, 1944 I was awakened by a telephone call merely

saying: "Our friends have arrived". The call came from Francis (Öcsi) Mauthner, a grandson of Manfred Weiss. At first I was annoyed by what I took for a silly joke. However, after a few seconds I became aware of the droning of airplanes, and it dawned on me what Öcsi meant to say and what had happened, namely that the Germans had arrived and occupied our country.

The Miracle

Hungary fell under German occupation on March 19, 1944. Life in Budapest changed immediately and drastically. I tried to ignore the occupation as much as I could and continued to go to my office regularly even though no member of the Baron Weiss family showed up any longer. Eugene and Alfons Weiss went into hiding with friends in Budapest. Eugene was found after two weeks and was put under arrest together with his son. Alfons remained in hiding. Kornfeld first to Oberlencendorf then to Mauthausen, Chorin to Oberlencendorf, from there back to Budapest.

A few days after the arrival of the German military forces in Hungary, a representative of the SS, Obersturmbannführer (corresponding to "colonel") Kurt Becher came to Budapest with the official mission to supervise and assure the orderly functioning of the Hungarian industry under the occupation. Becher had an additional, confidential assignment which was to try to build up for Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, an industrial power base in Hungary modeled after the Göringswerke which had boosted Göring's influence in the Third Reich. The background of this confidential assignment was a bitter power struggle between Himmler on the one hand and Göring and Ribbentrop, on the other hand.

With the arrest of Baron Eugene Weiss a good opportunity arose for Becher to carry out his confidential assignment. He arranged a meeting with Eugene Weiss and expressed his interest in acquiring a majority interest in the Manfred Weiss Works. Eugene replied that financial matters were outside of his competence and suggested that Becher should discuss his offer with William Billitz, a trusted vice-president of the Manfred Weiss Works. Billitz, in turn, advised Becher to contact Chorin as the only person with enough clout in the Baron Weiss family to arrange any such deal. Billitz also intimated to Becher that Chorin could be of immense help to him in carrying out Becher's main mission of assuring the orderly functioning of the Hungarian industry during the occupation.

Heeding Billitz's advice, Becher promptly went to Mauthausen to see Chorin and after a mutually successful exchange of ideas, Chorin was brought back to Budapest in secrecy. He was under lock and key in his own house on the Andrassy Street which by that time served as headquarters of the SS. Becher offered to Chorin to obtain freedom and the guarantee of the SS for the safe-conduct of all members of the Manfred Weiss family in return for the transfer to the SS of a majority interest in the Manfred Weiss Works, including the exclusive power of management. Chorin rejected that offer and proposed that to the extent legally possible the Baron Weiss family group would transfer to the SS the entire Manfred Weiss Works — rather than only an interest in

it, as asked by Becher — but in return the SS should secure the transfer of the entire family group to some neutral territory, such as Switzerland or Portugal. This counter-proposal was accepted by the SS with one surprising modification: instead of becoming owners of the Manfred Weiss they wished to become mere trustees of that concern for a period of 33 years; and obtain the so-called right of pre-emption i.e. the right to buy it in preference to others if it were offered for sale during that 33 year period. (According to Becher's testimony after the war it was he who proposed that modification of Chorin's proposal in order to avoid violating Hitler's promise not to plunder the economic establishment of Hungary.)

At that point Billitz contacted me and asked me to meet with the attorneys of the SS on behalf of the Baron Weiss family and assist in putting the intended transaction in appropriate legal form. Billitz also suggested that in view of the urgency and highly confidential nature of the transaction I should move into the Chorin house where a guest room would be put at my disposal. (Billitz did not tell me and I found it out much later, that Chorin was already staying in the same house, albeit in a locked and carefully guarded room.)

Within a day or two two SS attorneys arrived in Budapest: Dr. Schneider, the top legal counsel of the SS in Berlin; and Dr. Zabransky, their counsel in Vienna. Dr. Schneider left after we agreed on the legal structure of the transaction, and Dr. Zabransky and I went to work to draft the required documents. We were faced with several problems.

A few years earlier the Manfred Weiss Works was "aryanized" in order to enable the company to receive government orders and thus to stay in business. This "aryanization" consisted in the transfer of 51% of the company shares to gentile members of the Baron Weiss family, such as the wife of Eugene Weiss, two sons-in-law of Mrs. Mauthner and a daughter-in-law of Moritz Kornfeld. With respect to the company shares which remained in Jewish hands, the main problem was that they were blocked by a Hungarian government order; while with respect to the other shares the main problem was that their gentile owners could not be coerced to part with them.

An additional problem was that according to Hungarian law any transfer of shares of stock to foreigners, or more exactly, persons who were not permanent residents of Hungary, required government permit. I suggested several ways to get around that problem but to my surprise the SS attorneys were not interested in them. As Dr. Zabransky advised me, the absence of any required permit of the Hungarian government did not disturb the SS.

Of course, the basic defect of the intended transaction, which no legal artifice could hide, was that it was made under duress and according to universally accepted principles of law, the Baron Weiss family could attack it and have it annulled at any time later. I was astounded to notice that even this fundamental defect was slighted by the SS attorneys while they insisted on minutely observing the formal requirements concerning details.

It took me some time to understand the legal attitude of the SS. Apparently they still believed in a German victory and on the basis of that assumption they were prob-

ably right in taking for granted that the SS, as an elite institution of the victorious German Reich, would have no difficulty in obtaining any required permits from the government of an allied or vanquished country; nor would they have to be concerned by any Jewish claims based on duress or anything else. Their concern was to have the transaction put in such a legal form that it should withstand any attack by a rival organization within Germany.

The drafts of the documents required for the transaction were virtually completed by Zabransky and me when Billitz announced a surprising new development. He persuaded Becher that those Hungarians who participated in the preparation of the transaction behind the back of the Hungarian government were in danger of retaliation by the government after the disclosure of the transaction; and Becher obtained Himmler's consent that these individuals, called "Erfüllungsgehilfe" or "aids of implementation" should also be taken out of Hungary together with the Baron Weiss family group.

When I saw the list of the individuals to be transported to Portugal as "aids of implementation" I noticed that in addition to Billitz, his assistant Máriássy and me, it included four members of the family of Billitz and the girlfriend of Máriássy. (Máriássy and his girlfriend were subsequently dropped from that list because of a serious car accident of Máriássy.) I immediately asked Billitz if my father and stepmother could also be included in that list. Billitz's answer was that unfortunately that was not possible; he had already tried to add to the list two close friends of Edith Weiss, the youngest daughter of Manfred Weiss but his request had been denied on the ground that the list was already longer than contemplated.

Thus, I was astounded when a couple of days later, during one of my rare five-o'clock teas with Becher and Billitz, Becher, with the list of the "Erfüllungsgehilfe" in hand, expressed his surprise that I had no wife or sweetheart whom I wanted to take with me abroad. I replied that I was single but I had not quite decided yet whether to take advantage of the possibility of going to Portugal because I hesitated leaving my parents alone. Apparently my filial concern impressed Becher, and after Billitz confirmed to him that my parents were not exposed politically, he offered to try to obtain Himmler's approval for including my parents in the group to be transported to Portugal. I was further surprised when a week later Becher told me that the transportation of my parents to Portugal had been approved.

Shortly after this favorable development came the bad news. Upon reviewing the drafts prepared for the transaction, Himmler's entourage made a new demand: they wanted hostages, including at least one prominent member of the Baron Weiss family group, to remain in Germany until the end of the war to guarantee that the SS had not been deceived in any manner in connection with the transaction, and, further, that the members of the group transported abroad would not engage in anti-Nazi propaganda.

Becher appeared to be sincerely embarrassed by that new requirement and as the most convenient way to meet the hostage requirement, he suggested that Eugene Weiss, his gentile wife of Austrian origin, and their three children stay in Austria as hostages. However, the Weiss family was afraid that because of his weak nerves Eugene could not endure the hostage position, whereupon Alfons volunteered to be the "prominent"

hostage; and Öcsi's adventurous younger brother Hans Mauthner and George Kornfeld, the son of Moritz Kornfeld, together with George's gentile, Austrian wife, and their baby were designated to serve as additional hostages.

Before inserting a hostage provision in the draft agreements, I went to see Alfons at his hiding place in the home of a friend of his in Buda. Alfons confirmed that he did not mind serving as a hostage so long as his children were safe. As a curiosity I wish to record here Alfons' statement that he was only bothered by a provision in the proposed agreement pursuant to which the protection of the hostages in Germany as most-favored guests of the SS were conditioned on the hostages complying with all German laws.

Soon thereafter Zabransky and I completed our drafts. We covered the transaction in four documents and a considerable number of attachments.

Agreement I provided for the transfer by Mrs. Eugene Weiss to representatives of the SS of an empty shell company, i.e., a company virtually without any assets or liabilities. The purpose of this was to convey to the SS a vehicle to be used by the SS for the truly intended acquisitions by means of Agreement II.

Agreement II provided for the transfer by the members of the Weiss family group of all of their interests in the Manfred Weiss Works and its affiliated companies to the aforementioned vehicle company in trust for 25 years, the trustee to receive during that period a management fee based on the volume of the business of these companies plus one half of any dividends declared and to have the right of pre-emption during the trust period and one year thereafter.

Agreement III dealt with the re-transfer of the vehicle company to the Weiss family after 26 years unless the SS representatives exercised their right of pre-emption.

Finally, Agreement IV provided for the payment to the Weiss family group of 600 000 U.S. dollars in Portugal and Switzerland and 250 000 German Marks in Vienna; and further, it provided that the Agreements I, II and III would become null and void if any of the listed individuals did not arrive safely in Portugal or Switzerland, as agreed, or if the hostages in Germany were not treated as the most favored non-Jewish foreigners or if the agreed payments were not made.

After the approval of our final drafts by the SS headquarters and Chorin, I had a memorable meeting with Zabransky. He advised me that he had been asked by the SS to sign an affidavit confirming that everything was in order with respect of the documentation of our transaction. This put him in a difficult position. On the one hand, the requirement of secrecy prevented him from determining whether all the information supplied by me and all documents delivered or to be delivered to him were correct and authentic; yet on the other hand, he did not want to take on his conscience what might happen to the Weiss family group if he indicated any doubts. After having searched his conscience, he decided to rely on me and sign the requested affidavit if I gave him my word of honor that to the best of my knowledge everything was in order and nobody had tried to deceive him. To this Zabransky added two compliments. First that he trusted my knowledge of the Hungarian law because he repeatedly

checked my advice with an outsider attorney and my counsel was confirmed each time. Second, that he trusted my character because during our discussions I was always forthright and firm even though in fact I was in the power of the SS. I thanked Zabransky for his compliments and gave my word of honor that no foul play was involved. We shook hands; and Zabransky signed his affidavit which was the last document needed for the conclusion of the transaction.

The 17th of May was set for the signing of the Agreements. On the preceding evening I went to see my parents and to their stupefaction I asked them to pack: we were going to Portugal.

In the afternoon of May 17, Öcsi and Hans Mauthner picked up all individuals concerned and took them to the Mauthner villa in Buda. The proposed Agreements were read from beginning to end, and after some short remarks, they were signed and witnessed in several copies. (The witnessing was done by the attorneys Schneider and Zabransky for Becher on behalf of the SS; and by me and the brother-in-law of Billitz, Zoltán Fenyvesi for the Weiss group. Fenyvesi was an engineer whose only contact with the transaction was that he had married the sister of Billitz. I mention this because according to the report of the transaction by Kassai and Zinai on page 701 of the 1961 volume of *Századok* — the official periodical of the Hungarian Historical Society — Fenyvesi acted as an attorney-at-law for the Baron Weiss family group.)

After the signing of the Agreements a caravan of sixteen cars with over forty passengers and some SS guards left for Vienna in the darkness of the night. The German border guards had been instructed in advance to let the group pass and the Hungarian border guards were too meek to oppose. At the Westbahnhof (Western Railroad Station) of Vienna the passengers were transferred into Pullman cars and later the Pullman cars were moved further away from the city as a safeguard against bombardments.

I returned to my room in the Chorin house — which did not house Francis Chorin any longer — to pick up some share certificates and other documents from bank deposits and deliver them to Zabransky. Although I expected to join my parents and the Weiss group within a few days, my departure was delayed by a couple of weeks because Chorin decided to add some of his personal shareholdings in unrelated companies to those given by the Weiss group to Becher in trust — in the belief that under Becher's management they would be in safer hands than otherwise. This required the drafting of some supplements to Agreement II. Finally, at the beginning of June, my work was completed and Zabransky took me in his car to the railroad station near Vienna where I joined the Weiss family group and my parents.

I brought with me a file containing all the documents relating to the Weiss-SS transaction which I intended to take with me to Lisbon. However, a couple of days after my arrival near Vienna, I learned that we would not be permitted to take with us the confidential Agreement IV or any copy of it. Thereupon I took a signed original of that Agreement out of my file and hid it among my personal papers. Subsequently the SS went a step further and demanded that all papers relative to our transaction should remain in German territory and I was asked to leave my entire file in Germany. I did so with the curious result that I, and through me, the Weiss family group, lost posses-

sion of all documents of the transaction — with the exception of the only truly confidential one, namely Agreement IV which was already hidden among my personal papers and which I smuggled out from Germany and gave to Chorin before I left Lisbon.

About ten days after my arrival near Vienna, we were told that finally our visas had been obtained and our Pullman cars were attached to a train going to Stuttgart. Next day we left Germany. The “Aryan” Mauthner sons-in-law with their families and the half “Aryan” cousin of Francis Chorin were flown to Zürich, as promised to them as a reward for their cooperation, while the rest of the group, including my parents and me, boarded two Lufthansa airplanes chartered by the SS bound for Lisbon.

At the Lisbon airport it turned out that our visas, procured by the SS, were not in order. They were not false; but they had apparently been issued by the Portuguese consulate in Berlin without the required clearance of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal. We were interrogated at the airport for several hours but ultimately were given permission to stay in a luxurious hotel in Lisbon until further notice — undoubtedly under police surveillance.

I do not recall whether Billitz came to Lisbon with us or shortly afterwards. At any rate, he stayed in Lisbon only for a couple of days to bid farewell to his family and to the rest of us. Thereafter he returned to Budapest, as he promised to do — ostensibly to help Becher to carry out his duties as trustee in care of the Manfred Weiss Works and actually in order to save for the Baron Weiss family whatever could be saved. The family expressed its thanks and gratitude for Billitz’ devotion and for his achievements due, primarily, to his success in winning the trust of Becher. However, some family members immediately tried to push Billitz for further efforts in favor of relatives and friends left in Hungary. Billitz, already exhausted by the strain of two months of frantic activity under enormous pressure, was markedly irritated.

I never saw Billitz again. Before the end of the war he died in a hospital in Vienna, officially of typhus. However, it has been suspected that he was “disposed of” by the SS before his knowledge of many occurrences within the SS camp could have caused embarrassment or worse to some SS officials.

After the Miracle

Shortly after our arrival in Lisbon we were notified by the SS that they had not yet been able to come up with the entire sum due us, but \$ 170 000 was available to us in a hotel in Lisbon and the rest would be paid later. According to Agreement IV, this money was to be paid either to Francis Chorin or to Eugene Weiss but neither of them was inclined to collect American banknotes in a hotel known to be used by German officials. Thus, I was asked to pick up the money. I agreed; and was greatly relieved when after having received the banknotes in the designated hotel and taken them to a bank for checking, they were found to be genuine. (This sum was later distributed by

Chorin among all members of our group in Portugal for living expenses in monthly installments, the same sum having been allotted with respect to each person. According to my understanding, around the same time \$ 30 000 was paid by the SS to the Mauthner and Chorin relatives in Switzerland and \$ 250 000 German marks to Alfons Weiss in Vienna. As far as I know, the family later relinquished its claim for the remaining \$ 400 000 in return for the SS bringing out some further family friends from Hungary.)

After a couple of days the Portuguese authorities interned our entire group to Curia, a pleasant seaside resort half way between Lisbon and Porto. We stayed in good hotels, the only restriction imposed upon us being that we were not allowed to leave Curia without police permit. Even that restriction was not strictly enforced. I often went to nearby Coimbra by train to visit its famous university and to take out books from its library. Usually, but not always, I did so with police permission. At one occasion, when I did not bother to request a permit, I met a young man in the train who looked familiar to me. We got into a conversation, and I learned that I was talking to the man in charge of supervising our group on behalf of the police. We had a nice chat, and he assured me that my visit to Coimbra was o.k.

After a couple of months in Curia our internment was lifted and our entire group moved to Estoril, a fashionable seaside resort half an hour from Lisbon. Later, I moved to Lisbon but often went to Estoril to visit my parents and the Weiss group.

The Mauthner and Chorin relatives who had been flown to Switzerland also had initial visa problems, but after a while they too received regular residence permits. Thus, except for the fact that the hostages had to remain in German territory until the end of the war, the Weiss — SS transaction had been completed and carried out in all respects.

There remained one big problem for the Weiss family group, namely that of combating and removing the suspicion of having collaborated with the Nazis in exchange for freedom. This was important for the family, first, for moral reasons. In addition, it was important for them for financial reasons because they had substantial assets in the United States which were frozen when Hungary entered the war on the side of Germany and which probably would have ultimately been confiscated if the owners had been found to be Nazi collaborators.

This suspicion was widespread and had to be expected. Here was a wealthy family group of Jewish faith or extraction, including two influential members of the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament who had already been arrested and taken to concentration camps. These two prominent figures were lifted from the concentration camps and the entire family group together with those who acted on their behalf in concluding the transaction and their families, a total of 46 persons, were transported by the SS to neutral countries. They were provided with visas obtained by the SS with great effort, probably by illegal means, and also with hard currency to cover their living expenses in their exile. How to believe that these fantastic favors were bestowed by the SS upon prominent members of a hated and despised race without exacting something of equal value in return?

The answer is that, evidently, Himmler regarded the acquisition of control over the

second largest heavy industry concern of Central Europe by ostensibly legal means, worth the favors which his organization accorded to the Weiss family group. It may be, indeed, that in the event of a German victory that acquisition would have helped Himmler to obtain the number two power position in the Third Reich and thus, Himmler personally may have greatly profited from it. However, the German nation, as a whole, acquired nothing that it did not have before because at that time the entire Hungarian industry already stood totally in the service of the German war efforts which had become the joint war efforts of Germany and the occupied and nazified Hungary. This applied with particular force to the Manfred Weiss Works which produced armaments with increased ardour under the direction of a Hungarian Nazi of German extraction appointed to the helm of the company by the Hungarian government shortly after the owner-director Weiss brothers went into hiding.

Initially even I had difficulty in believing that the SS, as one faction of the German government charged with the persecution and ultimate extermination of the Jewish race, was prepared to bring sacrifices and grant enormous favors to a Jewish group for the sole purpose of advancing its power position against another faction, apparently the Ribbentrop — Göring clique, of the same government. Yet, by now this is an established historical fact. (See C. A. Macartney, *A History of Hungary, 1929–1945*, Part II, p. 261.)

In a sense, our transaction was an ingenious ploy devised by Chorin, sold to the SS by Billitz and put in legal form with my assistance which, exploiting Himmler's greed for more political power, induced the SS to rescue and treat lavishly a large Jewish family, in return for the control of a Hungarian industry concern which operated already fully according to the orders of the German government and evidently had to continue to do so until Germany's defeat, no matter what.*

*The subsequent condemnation of the transaction by the Hungarian government was not only unjust; it was outrageous. Two life members of the Upper House of the Hungarian parliament, married to daughters of Manfred Weiss, had been taken to Nazi concentration camps and one of the two sons of Manfred Weiss, together with his ten year old son, was locked up in Budapest; — and the Hungarian government did not lift a finger to protect them. Thereafter an opportunity presented itself for the Manfred Weiss families to have these abused men freed and all members of the Manfred Weiss families transported to neutral territory in return for the signing of documents giving power to the SS to manage the Manfred Weiss companies for some time — instead of their being managed by Hungarian Nazis in conformity with the commands of the German government. The Weiss group accepted that astonishing offer; indeed, it would have been senseless and suicidal not to do so. — If the Hungarian government was seriously apprehensive about the temporary transfer of the management of the largest Hungarian heavy industry concern to the SS it could have declared the transaction invalid on the ground that by law all transfers of Hungarian shares of stock to foreigners required the consent of the Hungarian government; or on the ground that 49% of the shares controlling the Manfred Weiss companies was admittedly still in Jewish hands and thus blocked by government order — and could not be disposed of; or on the ground that plainly, the transaction was made under duress — in self defense by the Weiss families. However, the Hungarian government lacked the courage to antagonize the SS and, after some meek protests, acquiesced in the transaction; it was so much easier to blame the Weiss group for unpatriotic conduct — after they have been abandoned by their government.

After Billitz returned to Budapest and died in Vienna a few months later, Chorin and I were the only persons outside of the SS camp who had first-hand knowledge of the transaction and, as a lawyer not a party to it, I was eminently suited to give credible evidence with respect to the facts relating to the transaction. Yet, to my surprise, I was not asked to assist the Weiss family group concerning their rehabilitation, even when that was suggested by outsiders.

The main reason for the Weiss family's reserved attitude toward me probably was lack of confidence. This was understandable because my earlier professional contact with the family was restricted to the person of Alfons Weiss who, I believe, trusted me fully but was not with us in Portugal. An additional reason might have been the irritation of several members of the Weiss group about the fact that I and even my parents were able to leave Hungary on their coattails while they had to leave behind their closest friends and relatives — including a lawyer-nephew of Kornfeld who, according to Kornfeld, should have represented the family in that affair. Last, not least, the Chorin, Kornfeld and Weiss families enjoyed tremendous respect in Hungary and they had difficulty in adjusting themselves to their status as refugees — in need of assistance.

This may explain the position taken by the family when I received a letter of introduction to the military attaché of the American Embassy in Lisbon from a former classmate of mine who emigrated to America many years earlier and I offered to the family to attempt to have one or two of their members invited to the Embassy. I knew that Chorin and Kornfeld were in correspondence with a former Ambassador of Hungary in the West for the purpose of establishing a direct contact between them and representatives of the American government. Yet my offer to serve as an intermediary was rejected. As Kornfeld told me: they intended to use their own channels exclusively toward the Americans.

Shortly thereafter I went to see the military attaché at the Embassy. Upon having told him how I left Hungary, he said that the Weiss transaction had been discussed at the Embassy and he thought that the Ambassador might be interested in seeing me. A few minutes later I was in the office of Ambassador Bernard Baruch, a brother of the former financial advisor of President Roosevelt. He was surprisingly poorly informed about Central Europe and even asked me to show on the map where Hungary was located. In a nutshell I explained to him the substance of the Weiss—SS transaction, whereupon he suggested that I describe it in more detail in a memorandum and that I see him again with the memorandum. Despite the earlier rejection by the family of my offer of intervention on their behalf, at that moment I could not resist suggesting to the Ambassador that he should see Chorin, as the main architect of the transaction. However, the Ambassador declined seeing any member of the Weiss group before having obtained a better understanding of their deal with the SS.

When I reported my visit to Chorin, he immediately announced that he wished to prepare the memorandum for the American Ambassador. Presumably he went to work promptly, but as I learned later, Eugene Weiss objected to Chorin's draft because it failed to point out the history and importance of the Manfred Weiss Works. Apparent-

ly Kornfeld also wanted to make some changes, and it took three weeks before I received the draft for filling in some details and transmitting it to the American Ambassador.

On the day of my appointment with the Ambassador Chorin asked whether I had any objection to his accompanying me. I felt embarrassed but I did not object. We went together to the office of the Ambassador's secretary. I introduced Chorin to the secretary, and she announced both of us to the Ambassador. A few minutes later an adjutant came out of the Ambassador's office and took Chorin into a side room. I was ushered to the Ambassador who made no comment on Chorin's unexpected appearance but told me that he would have to study our memorandum before deciding what position to take.

After that embarrassing incident I expected a word of apology or an expression of thanks from Chorin. It never came — but that did not bother me.

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I obtained my "first papers" for immigration into the U. S. A. in the summer of 1945 and departed for America in September of that year. As far as I know, in the following year the claim of the Manfred Weiss heirs to the American assets of the Manfred Weiss companies was recognized and these assets, as well as the assets individually owned in the U. S. A. by the participants in the transaction with the SS — seized during the war as enemy property — were freed. Subsequently most members of the Weiss family group moved from Portugal to the U. S. A.