

Dr. Kastner Denies Collaborating With Nazis

TEL AVIV (WNS) — Dr. Israel Kastner, former head of the Hungarian Jewish Rescue Committee who was branded a Nazi collaborator by District Judge Benjamin Halevy when he ruled against Kastner in a criminal libel action he brought against his accuser Malkiel Gruenwald, denied here ever having collaborated with the Nazis in a report on his role in Hungary during the Nazi occupation.

Declaring he hoped to clear his name when he appears in court on July 31 to testify in the perjury complaint filed against him by Dr. Gruenwald, Dr. Kastner said "It was not I who collaborated with the Germans, but some Germans, particularly the Nazi leader Col. Kurt Becher who collaborated with me." Not only had he and his colleagues "done nothing against Jewish interests, but we wrote an heroic chapter of devotion and sacrifice which deserves great appreciation." He credited Colonel Becher with having saved thousands of Jews, declaring that the Jews who remained alive at the end of the war in such camps as Belsen, Terezin and others survived because Colonel Becher, Himmler's deputy, was a realist who foresaw Hitler's collapse and therefore intervened so as to have an alibi.

Dr. Kastner said he joined the rescue underground in 1941. When the Germans occupied Hungary, Dr. Kastner stated, it was natural that he, a member of the Mapai Party, should have been added to a rescue committee which represented most of the Zionist parties. This committee, he added, decided to negotiate with the Germans on the basis of trading Jewish lives for money, an approach, he said, which enabled the committee to gain time for its other activities, such as forging documents and providing funds for refugees from other countries. Dr. Kastner asserted that the rescue committee, particularly through negotiations with Becher and Himmler, was responsible for the saving of 15,000 Jews through transfer to Vienna, the rescue of 80,000 of Budapest's 170,000 Jews through forged documents and shelter in friendly home, the saving of another 1,600 aboard a train that was headed for Belsen and the rescue of many thousands in various camps.

Dr. Kastner said he hoped to write a book on the Jewish tragedy in Hungary, but that he did not believe this was a propitious time for such a work. He expects to wait a decade so as to have a better perspective.