

## Chapter Seven

# The Shelter That Failed

### A. The Work of Bernard Kurland

The men and women, who were sent to Apparatebau in June 1943, did not find better conditions there, than those that the veterans, who arrived in the autumn of 1942, had. Bela Sandler recalled:

“We were about 1,000 women. Our place of residence was in a huge empty production hall. A concrete floor covered with straw served as a sleeping place. The overcrowding was terrible. There were no mattresses. Along the longest wall was an iron sink with a pipe with taps above it. It was a latrine for a thousand women.

“In the morning, fights broke out near the taps and we all felt unwashed. The worst was at night, because we were forbidden to go out to the toilet, which was in the factory building. At night, the area around the sinks became a public latrine. Soon an epidemic broke out - scabies. Both of us, me and Rut Cytter (Sztern), who I had befriended, sold portions of bread, and the Polish woman, who worked with us, bought us a suitable ointment.”<sup>1</sup>

Dirt and disease were not the only dangers that lurked for the women. It happened at night that one of the *Werkschutz*, bored by his solitude, would find a girl he liked and carry her out to a secluded corner. He would then bring her back, crying, hurt and humiliated. Once, in the middle of the night, one of the masters, completely drunk, entered the women’s hall. With a flashlight in his hand, he walked between the rows and illuminated the faces of the sleeping women. When he finally found what he wanted, he pounced on her and raped her, oblivious to everything around him.<sup>2</sup>

The living conditions of the men were no better. Unlike the women, who knew how to find a needle and thread under the ground, they quickly became vagrants dressed in rags. The biggest blow remained hunger. Of course, not everyone lived on the factory bread alone. There were still those with money, who bought groceries from the Poles. The trade brought the middlemen a handsome profit because, in the city market, half a loaf of black bread cost 12.00 zł and, in the factory, it was three times more.

Bernard Kurland, whom the camp’s director Lütt appointed as “Camp Elder” (*Lagerälteste*), decided to change the situation radically and proposed organising a canteen for the prisoners - the factory would provide good quality bread, and Jews could buy it for 24.00 zł. per half a kilo.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bela Sandler, YVA 0-33/6882

<sup>2</sup> Kromołowski, *Wspomnienia*, p. 740

<sup>3</sup> Einhorn, *Wybrany aby żyć*, p. 141

Kurland also managed to organise tailors' and shoemakers' workshops, where prisoners could repair clothes and shoes. For men, a barbershop was established on his initiative. Permission was given to occasionally use the hot water bath facilities, which were located on the factory premises.

The sudden arrival of hundreds of Jews from the "Small Ghetto" caused chaos in the factory grounds.

Everywhere was crowded, the new ones did not know where their workplace was. The workers were transferred from one place to another and production steadily decreased. Dirt spread in the halls and prisoners' bundles rolled under the production tables. Several Jewish policemen, who had been sent from the ghetto earlier, tried to restore order, which did not please the veteran Jewish supervisors and even less so the German managers.

Everyone felt that this situation could not last long. They were just afraid to think, at what cost it would change.

Despite all the difficulties, some began to adapt to the new situation. The process of adaptation was, of course, easier for those who had a kindred spirit.

The young couple, Izio Abramzon and his wife Jadzia, were happy when they would meet in the evening. The wedding rings quickly turned into loaves of bread, but that did not matter - the main thing was that they were together.<sup>4</sup> With Julia Babiacki came her sister with her policeman husband and a child (the policemen and their families were housed in a separate place, far from the prisoners' quarters). There were other lucky families, who managed to be together over their time in HASAG-Pelcery. Arje Edelist says:

"In early November 1942, we moved to the 'Small Ghetto' and, after a short period, the family reunited here. Each of us worked in a different place. I had worked in HASAG even before the liquidation of the 'Small Ghetto'. So, on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1943, when the 'Small Ghetto' was liquidated, I remained in HASAG. I was still alone. My father and mother were still in the ghetto during its liquidation. My brother worked in Raków and my sister and her husband were employed by Rawo, a small company that collected scrap metal for the Germans.

"In HASAG, for the first few months, I worked in the transport department. The steel bundles and pipes were loaded onto our backs and we carried them, on foot, to the departments or warehouses. Our porter group consisted of eight people and I was the youngest in the group. The group was called 'Heavy Transport', because all the heavy loads and moving were assigned to us. The group supervisor was Essig, a good fellow, who never beat his workers and provided them with food and rest.

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Klein, *Not Now, Not Ever*, p. 53

“The work was very hard. Occasionally, I unloaded a whole wagon of coal by myself. Another difficulty - I had no shoes, only broken sandals. This problem was solved in an ingenious way. Small crates, used for transporting bullets, were scattered all over the factory grounds. The lid of each crate was attached to the crate body with small leather straps. At the end of the day, I cut the straps off several crates and gave them to the cobbler, who, in exchange for repairing the sandals, received the leftover straps.

“After they moved to HASAG, my mother worked as a washerwoman in the camp laundry. Father worked in the *Presserei*, and my sister in the recalibration of casings (*Rekalibrierung*). My brother Menachem still remained in the Raków camp, and my brother-in-law worked in the kitchen.

“After a period of a few months, we managed to change jobs – my father was in charge of the *Presserei* barracks and his main occupation was cleaning work. My brother was transferred from Raków to our camp and worked in construction, and I left the transport and was also transferred to the construction department. Father’s transfer was very important to him. It was especially important to him that he stayed in the barracks, which gave him the opportunity to pray in the morning and study during the day. His bunk and the area around it became a home for his ultra-Orthodox friends, who gathered and engaged in Torah discussions.”

However, only a few were lucky enough to meet with all the family members in the evening. Henia Lustiger, who only learned in HASAG about the deaths of her father and Oleś, sank into despair - both of them? The twelve-year-old boy, her beloved and only one, he was murdered? She did not stop crying and Norbert could not calm her down. At night, before the lights went out, Henia shed her tears along with words torn from the heart:

Ktoś kiedyś zrodził się na świat	Przyszła brutalna, dzika “dłoń,”
Gdzieś matka miała dziecię...	Miała coś przeciw temu,
Ktoś opromieniał szczęściem dom	Aby spokojne życie wiódł
Biegając sobie po świecie...	Więc – dom zabrała jemu...
I miał ten“ ktoś“ swój własny ką,	Cięła i żęła... na swój stos
I ojca co go tulił	Ofiary wciąż składała,
W oczy patrzyła matka mu,	Jak chciwy rab, niesyty krwi
Więc pieścił się i czulił.	I matkę mu zabrała...
I nic nie wiedział mały “ktoś“,	A że nie miała jeszcze dość
Że na tym pięknym świecie	Zabrała mu “dłoń“ i brata,
Istnieje zło i brud i ból	I widział łzy i słyszał krzyk
Co dręczą nawet – dziecię...	W rozpacz: “Mama, tata!”

Niewinnych, drobnych piskląt rój	Garstka została - resztę tą
Powiedli na stracenie!	Zamknęła "dłoń" za kraty,
Widział ich strach i wielki ból	Przygotowała ciasny "dom",
Czuł małych ciałek drzenie...	Baraki, głód i... baty!
Wiele ich poszło, ojców, siostr,	Zrobić nie może - nic a nic!
Ojców i matek wiele,	Nie pyta już - dlaczego?
Duszono ich, palono ich,	Snuje wspomnienia cienką nić,
Mszczono się na ich ciele...	Wracając wciąż do tego...

(Henia Lustiger - spisane na pryczy hasagowej)

Somewhere, a man was born;  
Once a child came into this world.  
He grew up and out of his nappies  
And about in the world he walked...

After Mother it took away Father  
And soft, helpless Brother.  
It did the same to thousands more.  
Crime upon crime...

He had a father, he had a mother;  
They caressed and pampered him.  
He was cheerful and happy,  
And life gave him joy...

Small, large, toddlers,  
Old people it carried to death.  
The cry of anguish rose,  
Pierced the heavens through...

And he did not know that the world,  
Which seemed so beautiful to him,  
Is ruled by evil and malice,  
Which would surely smite him...

Again, he could do nothing;  
He only said: "Please, why?"  
The "Hand" laughed its cunning laugh;  
Its plot was not yet finished...

Suddenly came a horrific "Hand";  
A "Hand" that could not accept  
That he should live in peace...  
It took his mother...

For the handful that remained,  
It prepared a cage with bars.  
Arduous labour and whipping,  
Awaited there each man.

And unable to do a thing,  
He only asked: "Why? Why?"  
The "Hand" laughed its cunning laugh;  
Its plot was not yet finished...

"He" lies in the dark hovel  
To which It brought him.  
As the memories torture him, returning;  
Again and again returning...<sup>5</sup>

Henia Lustiger (written on a bunk in the HASAG camp)

[TN: This poem was translated directly from the Hebrew.  
In many details, it diverges from the original Polish featured above.]

<sup>5</sup> Henia Lustiger, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, pp. 391-392. Source: The poem is found in the author's diary.

Luckily for her, Henia was with Norbert, who had managed to get accepted into the "Plumbers' Club". The comfortable living quarters in the plumbers' warehouse, including a bed behind a partition, made it easy for Norbert to restore his wife's will to live. But Alfred Kromołowski remained lonely and worried, because Stela had not managed to move from the [ul.] Garibaldi warehouses to HASAG.

19<sup>th</sup> July 1943 arrived. Even before noon, when rumours of a selection had spread, people ran to Kurland and asked what was going on. The Camp Elder's response was not optimistic, "They are thirsting for Jewish blood again."<sup>6</sup>

This is what Henia Lustiger wrote in her diary:

*The next day, when the day's shift finished work and the plumbers' group sat down to eat breakfast, the door burst open and the policeman Feldman entered, shouting, "Get out! Get out! We're going to the roll-call!"*

*"Roll-call?" – Staszek, the head of the group, was surprised. "Why now, suddenly? I don't like it. And you don't care about anything, like the entire Jewish police!"*

*"It is thanks to this that I live with my family!", Feldman replied.*

*"Like this?" Staszek responded, "And how many people have you already sent to the afterlife?"*

*"I will help the Germans send as many Jews as they want. The main thing is that I can save my wife and children!", Feldman replied.*

*Staszek could not hold back any longer and pounced at Feldman with fists. They barely separated them and everyone went out to the roll-call."<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> *Churban Czenstochow*, p. 26 2

<sup>7</sup> Chapter 19, pp. 14-13 Lustiger, *Pamiętnik*, this passage is not found in the author's book.